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AUTHORSHIP AND JOURNALISM

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ETC.



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PREFACE

THE popularity of " Schools " which give instruction in authorship and journalism calls attention to the fact that there are many young men and women who have not yet selected their career, and who feel drawn to earning a living with the pen.

Some of these join one of the schools, but a far larger number are reluctant to do so, and would prefer the school lessons presented in a manner which does not involve them in the work of correspondence, or which does not commit them to much expense till they can gauge their ability.

The model of this book is largely the school lesson. It is in no sense a new edition of the author's previous work, " How to Write for the Papers," but is a companion book presenting the case from a different angle.

It begins with the actual technical work of word placing and sentence making, and may be used for educational purposes, not as a series of lessons in literature, but of lessons in the creation of the printed matter that editors buy and pay for.

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AUTHORSHIP AND JOURNALISM

CHAPTER I

PROFESSIONAL AUTHORSHIP AND JOURNALISM

ABOUT thirty-five years ago a business man caught his son doing a dreadful deed. The youth, aged about 18, was dispatching a manuscript and a stamped return envelope to an editor.

The father was a kind man, with much tact and discretion, so he spoke moderately to his son.

"My boy," he said, "as you grow older people will look to you to become a self-supporting, responsible citizen. Naturally you will wish to do as I have done : to live in a nice house, send your children to good schools, clothe and feed your family well, employ a servant. I am not a rich man, as you know, but I have always earned hundreds of pounds a year—sometimes six, sometimes eight. That is the result of business.

"You are playing about with writing in your evenings. You may be tempted to adopt writing altogether unless you stop at once. What will that mean? An attic, poverty, and struggles all the time. Many a day you will wonder where your next meal is coming from. Stop it, my boy. You are already very promising in my office. Stick to business and make a comfortable living."

That man expressed the opinion of many people of his generation. It was not an isolated view, at all events in the provinces. Success of some kind in business was

held to be assured if people were ordinarily industrious : successes in journalism and authorship were regarded as flukes that came to the very few.

Since that time business has changed somewhat in character, demanding rather more imagination and containing greater elements of uncertainty.

During the same time, writing for the press has become more systematized, and, as regards payments, less than ever a gamble with fate. It is recognized that the man who writes a column of a newspaper has done a good day's work and requires a good day's pay, more : that he will not continue to write such matter as the editor requires, merely for the relief of his feelings—and, even more than that, that it is sound business to give him two, three, or many days' pay, for the column that readers, by the thousand, desire to read.

The Truth about Writing as a Profession:

In this book it is intended to state clearly, fully, and proportionately the real truth about writing as a profession.

Perhaps this can be done rather aptly by quoting the words of an experienced editor-journalist. " Authorship and journalism," he said, " are the easiest occupations in the world by which to earn under £3 a week or over £20 a week. But every pound between £3 and £20 is collar-work."

This puts the case in a nutshell. Fleet Street dearly loves a worker. If a man or woman who can write, puts as much energy into this occupation as would be required to retain, say, an employed position in the city, £3 a week ought to be fairly easily earned.

While the writer is in that state that he must be his own literary agent, and keep sending out his manuscripts or keep on calling at offices—in that state in

which everything is placed by some definite act of salesmanship on his part—it is hard for him to make quite as much money as an equally successful business man might make.

Ten pounds a week earned by a series of constant endeavours to place manuscripts of all kinds represent in many cases a life of strenuous effort, in which not only the whole working day but many hours of the night may be necessary to do the work involved.

In contrast with him the writer who has a personal following is in much easier case. When an author's article sells a paper, when his series increase the circulation and lift the advertisement value of the columns, or when his book must be reproduced in edition after edition to satisfy an eager market, money comes in very easily indeed.

These two classes were probably the people in mind when the above opinion was expressed.

But between these two classes, there is another, so important in the realms of printer's ink, and so apt to be overlooked by the outsider, that it is well to call attention to it.

This consists of the men and women who have become known to the editors and publishers as reliable and capable workers. In Fleet Street, as in commerce, a connection requires to be built up and retained at the cost of continuous effort ; but here, as elsewhere, a connection acquires a value of its own.

The man who is known to be punctual in delivering his copy, to be painstaking in his efforts, to be trustworthy and cautious in his statements, is the ally whom the editor esteems.

In nearly every publishing office there is work requiring a writer's ability, which the inside staff has no time to do, and of which chance contributors do not

think. The man who is known by the editor as sound and reliable, is often commissioned in such cases.

The publishing world relies only partly upon ideas and contributions submitted from outside. Many of the best articles and books that appear are outlined in the first place, by editors, publishers, and members of the staff. In such cases the work is frequently commissioned, and dependable writers who keep in touch with the firm are selected for such tasks.

Hard Work or Easy Work ?

Some people are attracted to authorship or journalism, through a mistaken impression that the pay is always substantial for the amount of work involved. The spectacular successes of authorship have much to do with this false opinion.

When a young man hears that a "best seller" has just brought its author fifty or a hundred thousand pounds, in addition to ten or twenty thousand pounds for film rights, he is apt to take a fantastic view of authorship as a whole. It is easy to count the number of words on a page, and the number of pages in the book, and roughly to estimate that, writing at the rate of four hours a day, a very few weeks will suffice to write a popular novel.

Some eager calculators, not even content with this enormous financial return for small labour expended, picture possibilities of yet greater cuts in exertion:

"One needn't even write oneself. One can dictate."

"There are 'ghosts' and cheap writers who will fill in the padding if one does the main scenes."

"If I can write a fairly decent first book to catch the public eye, any old thing will sell afterwards."

We have all heard such optimistic statements as these, and it is only natural to form the conclusion

that many of them are made by aspirants who are attracted by the hope of earning money easily, rather more than by the pleasing delight of using the pen.

There are people who select a calling because they love the work : there are others who select it because of its advantages. The beginner should think twice about earning his living by the pen for the second reason. It is understandable that a young man should enter a bank because the hours are few, or become a school-master because the holidays are long ; but the beginner who enters authorship or journalism for any such fancied advantage is pretty sure to suffer a severe shock a little later on.

The work is not necessarily hard or easy, nor are the hours definitely long or short. In fact such considerations do not enter into the case at all. The real journalist or author does not think about such trivialities. He loves his profession, and when he ceases to love it the quicker he gets a divorce from it the better.

Possibly the reader will say : " This is all rather vague. Surely it is possible to give some indication as to what constitutes a good working day for anyone in this line."

A good reply to make to such an objection is something like this : " A writer does not earn his living by the quantity he writes, but by the quantity and quality that is accepted, published, and paid for."

There are people who can write a thousand words of original matter in an hour or less. But it may take those same people ten or twenty hours to write a thousand words that will be published.

Equally there are men and women in London, some of them quite unknown to the general public, who can turn out good, readable work at a fair speed throughout several hours in the day, and find a large market for

every line of it. One of the earliest victims of the War was a young man, still in his twenties, who fixed his day's work at 10,000 words and rarely took a holiday. It was his constant perplexity that he could not keep up with the orders that editors thrust upon him.

In this case it is probable that he would have done better for himself had he written less and selected his markets, but his prodigious fertility and his love of one special kind of writing in which prices are more or less fixed, kept him in a regular groove. None the less his income would have been held to be highly satisfactory by many a doctor, lawyer, or business man.

A young man who is thinking of entering this career, who fidgets himself too much about the amount of work he has to do, is rather like a lover who wants to bargain with his well-beloved as to how much time he shall have to himself after they are married. The young man who is really in love does not want to make terms of this sort: the proper kind of would-be author or journalist is in like case.

The Writers who Make Fortunes.

And now a word or two about those people who make great fortunes out of a single book.

As far as the public is concerned, it seems that an unknown man writes a book, receives a cheque for £12,000 a few weeks after it is published, another cheque for £20,000 a few months later, still further cheques for large sums, till an amazing sum is reached, and then begins to tot up profits on his second work.

Who are these fortunate folk? Are they those who take up a pen for the first time in their lives and dash off a masterpiece? No! They are the men and women who worked for twenty years not only by day, but also by night. Some of them could show you

a pile of rejected manuscripts that would appal you. Some could tell tales of a whole day and night spent in tortured earnestness, over an effort to earn a stray guinea.

The writer of these lines has read some of the "best sellers" of the present period, and nearly always, from inner knowledge of the case, he has been able to say: "This author deserves all the success that the work has brought."

During the War, a great publishing firm asked its editors to give information about those men who were regularly earning five pounds a week and upwards in writing for its publications. The firm desired to "encourage slackers to do their duty." The list of workers included many who were earning such sums as made it a reasonable presumption that they gained most of their income from the firm.

The report was startling.

"Only the name of one man of military age is on the list, and he was killed in Flanders."

The directors were surprised.

"Are all our chief writers merely back numbers?" they asked. "Is no new blood being discovered?"

The answer of the editors was equally interesting.

"It seems to take ten or twenty years' hard practice with the pen, to equip a man or woman with the ability to write the stories we buy in large quantities. Chance contributors may be younger, but the steady, continuous, well-paid work is done by those who have put years of effort into it."

Take a pen in your hand!

Mightier than the sword? It is mightier than the machine gun. It is the implement that makes war or makes peace. A slip of the pen may cause a revolution and lose a million lives. A carelessly written line

may hurl a crown from a monarch's head or ruin a nation.

The beginner looks at the pen.

"I am going to earn my living by this," he says.

Yet he imagines he can give less thought to that pen, its powers and possibilities, than the jobbing carpenter gives to his chisel or saw.

It cannot be done.

The things that look easy to do are usually far from easy to do well. It is, for example, quite easy to make a speech, but it is by no means easy to become such a platform man that every hall is crowded an hour before the time, by multitudes who wish to hear the oration. It is easy to sing a song, but it is not easy to become such a singer that all the managers want you. It is easy to dress up in fancy attire and strut about, but it is not easy to do it in the way that makes million-dollar films.

Natural Ability and Sincere Work.

This book sets out to teach authorship and journalism, or rather to indicate the ways in which these professions may be learnt. There is a vast amount of difference between "being taught" and "learning" in this life. At the beginning and right through the aspirant is thrown back upon his own efforts, and must do what cannot be done for him.

It is recognized that there are two classes of people to whom this course of lessons may have no appeal:

1. Those who are naturally so gifted and brilliant that it would be sheer presumption for anyone to attempt to guide the course of their genius. The idea of anyone even offering a hint or a criticism of the natural publicist and poet is absurd. Who taught Kipling? Who taught Dickens? Who taught Mark

Twain? If you are a genius of this calibre this book is of no use to you : put it in the fire and follow your bent.

2. Those who are so illiterate and ill-informed that the formation of a sentence is a task, the writing of a letter, an impossibility ; who are chaotic in grammar, original and elastic in spelling, and out of touch with human life.

The reader, however, can be too modest here. He may regard himself as a member of this class quite unnecessarily. A writer who has quite a large public, and who is admired for the intense simplicity of his language, once exclaimed : " I have to write simply. I can't spell long words, and I can't think in long sentences."

Between these two extremes there is a yet larger class, that is neither illiterate nor fired with genius. Thanks to the spread of education it is a growing class.

It comprises all those people, young people especially, who have had a fairly good education, who can write a decent letter, who can convey their thoughts to other people, through the pen, with understandable clearness, and who are abreast of the circumstances of life in one form or another.

This book is written especially for this great public, whom we may here describe as the average youth of the day. It is not suggested that any one of them picked at random can become, by taking thought, a great poet or a great editor ; but it is contended that almost any one of them can make some kind of a livelihood at authorship or journalism. It is admitted that some would find it a hard task to do so ; it is also admitted that here or there are some few who would achieve amazing success.

CHAPTER II

SENTENCE MAKING

A HOUSE is built by adding brick to brick. A book is written by adding sentence to sentence. If the bricks are not sound and well made the house will not be a good house. If the sentences are not well formed the book will not be a pleasing work.

In teaching a man how to build a house, instructors do not, as a rule, begin by telling him how to make a brick. He has the material for the building ready to his hand, and his work largely consists in laying the bricks together in pursuance of the decided plan.

But in writing an article, a story, or a book, the author must go rather further back. He has to make his bricks as he builds the house.

Almost the worst fault in a new writer is snatching at ready-made sentences and phrases. There are large numbers of these lying about, and they come easily to the pen. But the beginner should not put in ready-made bricks of this kind.

Such phrases as "She drew herself to her full height," "At the psychological moment," "The succulent bivalve," "He trembled like an aspen leaf," "I beseech you on my bended knees," have no merit. They are not stately or delicate quotations from works of art, they are merely trite commonplace formulae—padding!

The writer should make his own bricks, that is, form his own sentences, putting suitable and telling words together in such combinations as please his own ear and express his own thoughts.

Begin with Small Bricks.

Begin with small bricks—that is, with short sentences. Do not use too many kinds of stops at this stage. Very good practice can be obtained by writing a number of short, sharp sentences with only one punctuation mark : the full stop. This would not do perhaps for a finished article (although in some cases there is no reason why it should not), but it makes an excellent first draft for the beginner.

The idea is, you deal with each part of the subject by itself. You put each separate statement into a compact compartment of a few words, writing it on paper, just as you lay a brick in its place. Then you take the next statement and put that by its side, and go on till the whole narrative is completed. Commence each sentence with a capital letter and end it with a full stop.

Let us do this :

“ John met Mary in High Street. He raised his hat and bowed. Mary turned away. Her manner was distant. Clearly she was angry. He guessed the reason. He had called on the Bensons. Mary had heard of his call. She disliked Gabrielle Benson. She had a generous nature as a rule. But she was inclined to be jealous.”

These sentences average about five words each. They are all so short and simple that almost anyone could write a story in this way. It would not matter what incident might be selected, as the treatment would cover almost any case.

Let us try another example.

“ A fire broke out at No. 11. The top storey was quickly ablaze. In ten minutes the roof fell in. Most of the neighbours were anxious but calm. Mr. Harkness at No. 7 was the exception. His house was

uninsured. He had forgotten to pay the premium. His policy had lapsed. The fire engine had not arrived. No. 9 had already caught."

It will be seen that a quite clear picture can be presented in this way. The story can even be psychological, for, in the facts that the property of Mr. Harkness was uninsured, and that he was not calm, an impression of that gentleman can be created, which makes it easy for us to see his mind at work. We can trace the processes of agitation, of fear, of perplexity, of hope, and of despair.

The Second Draft : Smoothing the Edges.

It will be seen, however, that a book or even a short article, written in this way, would be rather trying matter for people who are accustomed to fairly rapid reading.

Without doubt this is the easiest kind of reading for almost illiterate folk who have to spell out the long words, or for those who are slow at grasping ideas. It gives them just one little fact after another, and the mind can pause at the full stop, not only to make sure of the meaning of the last little bunch of five or six words, but to add this statement to those previously acquired.

There is probably a need for more printed matter of this kind : the difficulty, however, is that most editors and publishers have the quick kind of brain that absorbs long sentences easily and is impatient of "jerks," and many of them would hesitate to make use of matter which, however useful to one class of reader, would be irritating to the man who reads quickly.

So here the short sentence plan is not presented as a final plan. It is suggested as a first draft by the beginner at writing.

By its means he can write a narrative slowly, clearly, and avoid confusion as he does it.

If he finds the plan still easier, he can write these short sentences on separate pieces of paper or separate lines as they come into his mind, so that he need not trouble about the order, or have to worry as to what comes next. Thus, in the second of the instances given, he can write it in this order :

“ No. 7 was not insured.”

“ There was a fire at No. 11.”

“ The roof fell in before the fire engine arrived.”

When all the different parts have been written down the papers can be sorted, or the separate lines cut and pasted in order. The effect would be rather more jerky than the other, but this would not matter in a first draft.

Now we come to the task of making a second draft.

It will be noticed that there are few prepositions or conjunctions in the first draft. The value of these simple words is chiefly to link one statement with another, and more than that to indicate the bearing and proportion of each in the whole paragraph.

In our second draft we do away with some of the capitals and full stops and insert simple words that link up two sentences into one, or we make some other easy change which rubs down the corners and makes the language run more easily.

We rewrite the first of these examples, making as few changes as possible :

“ John met Mary in High Street. He raised his hat and bowed, but she turned away ; and her manner was so distant that it was clear that she was angry. He guessed the reason : he had called on the Bensons and Mary had heard of his call. She disliked Gabrielle Benson, and though, as a rule, she had a generous nature, she was inclined to be jealous.”

This introduces no new facts or reasons : it follows

the line of the first draft with nearly exact fidelity. But almost certainly, in rewriting it would be found that here and there better words could be used, or that another sentence or two could profitably be introduced.

Or, if the writer fear there would be a danger of losing grip of the plan by trying to make too many changes at once, he could pass on to a third draft, in which he could introduce the added facts or make his modification.

Simple Sentences Expanded.

Still keeping this sentence in view, we will now take the case of a writer who wishes, in telling a story, to reveal the inside of a person's mind : that is to say, he wishes to be a psychological writer up to the full limit of his capabilities.

There are many people like this among beginners. Their interest is always along the line of feeling, rather than of fact : action is not so important to them as the effect of action upon the mind, or the mental processes that lead up to the action.

Such people, as beginners, often get into a terrible tangle, their desire to describe feelings preventing any clear presentation of incidents. So the story becomes jumbled up and a failure on that account.

Now if a writer of this kind wishes to avoid such confusion, the short sentence plan will help him very much indeed. But in his first draft he should keep to incidents as closely as he can, just telling the simple story.

In a second draft he can smooth out and clean up his narrative so as to make it run a little smoother, in the manner already indicated.

But with either the first or the second draft he has a basis of clearly told incident that should help him very much indeed. He can then set to work to alter and expand these sentences as he comes to them. He

may add many new facts, but he must not take them out unless he puts something in to take their place.

These sentences can be the skeleton—and it would be a serious thing for a doctor to remove, say, a section of the thigh bone without putting a silver tube or something in its place.

So let us see how our writer proceeds. He has the second draft of the John and Mary story before him :

“ The rain softened into an uncomfortable drizzle as John turned into High Street. It seemed to him he had never seen that thoroughfare look so mean and dingy. The very shop windows were cheerless and bleak, for it was nearly the last day of sales week, and Mayle & Wordleys, usually the one bright frontage of them all, showed torn bills and half-stripped shelves and littered floors.

“ Suddenly he caught sight of Mary approaching him, and felt anything but happy at the prospect of meeting her. He was cross and ill at ease, and the incidents at the office were worrying him. He wished to stand well in Mary’s eyes, but he was painfully aware that in his present frame of mind he would not be able to do so.

“ However, as she came near he lifted his hat and bowed. To his astonishment a glint, distinctly unfriendly and apparently indignant, came into her eyes, and she assumed a manner so distant and cold that it was clear that she was angry with him. Her manner was not intended as a ‘ cut,’ so much as to indicate a sense of injury, and was meant to put him in the wrong.

“ In an instant his mind suggested the explanation of her action : it was obvious that somehow or other she had come to hear of his call on the Bensons, and had not understood the reasons for that call. He himself, in paying the visit, had entirely overlooked the old dislike

that she felt for Gabrielle Benson, and that in view of past happenings the action might be misunderstood.

“John remembered, too, a little sadly perhaps, that Mary, though of a warm-hearted, generous disposition in most circumstances, had a jealous streak in her nature.”

The above elaboration of the first draft introduces a number of new incidents and notes and reveals a little of the character of the two persons. It is not presented as a pattern of composition, but rather as the kind of writing that might be quite easy to a beginner who had got the “bones” together in the first place.

The advantage of this short sentence draft to many people who are quite capable of writing long flowing passages, is that it makes them think of the reader just at the moment when he is most likely to be forgotten. The man with the pen, deeply engrossed in the feelings of an agitated person acting under difficult circumstances, may overlook the importance of stating what those circumstances are, and so leave the poor reader stranded high and dry in a place of bewilderment. But the simple narrative keeps the penman down to the realization that he must let the reader know the bare facts of what he is writing about.

Does the Padding Improve the Story ?

Another very important value lies in the possibility of comparing the bald narrative with the extended story. At once the writer can discover if his high-flown language or careful analysis of feeling has improved the tale. He may wake up to the understanding that the shorter work has a narrative value, and the additional verbiage is merely “talking through the hat.”

Length or shortness scarcely matters at all in writing.

There is no worthiness in either, as such ; many a good novel could be boiled down to an anecdote and still be good : many a brief story has a theme that would be equally suitable for a long novel.

But in all writing, no words should be meaningless. The hundred words can be lengthened into a thousand, but the added nine hundred must justify themselves. It is not demanded that they make the story ten times as good, but that the average quality be at least maintained and the general effect be not weakened by dilution.

For example, supposing Charles Dickens, instead of merely giving us a casual brief account of Sairey Gamp's friend and fellow nurse, Betsy Prig, had paused awhile to throw more light on Betsy and the whole of the Prig family, it would have lengthened the story, but would not have diluted it. We might depend upon it that the added matter would at least have maintained the general average quality of the whole, and this would have been secured by the natural charm belonging to the added parts.

CHAPTER III

STATING INCIDENTS AND STATING ARGUMENTS

IN the previous chapter the method of building up smooth sentences from jerky bunches of words, was indicated. This method is capable of being applied to any kind of writing.

A distinction should be drawn between this first draft, and what is called a synopsis. In actual work by a practised writer, a synopsis may be made either on paper or mentally, and the story or article written from this without any preliminary drafts being made. Methods, however, differ, and there are some writers who will write and rewrite their work many times, while those who work right away on the final manuscript, usually do a good deal of mental sub-editing and sentence planning.

The beginner will probably find that there will come a time when he can dispense with his first draft and write complete paragraphs from a " synopsis."

In order that the difference between a synopsis and a first draft may be realized, we will now put the " John and Mary " incident, treated in the previous chapter, into synoptic form. It will need to be remembered that the incident is only supposed to be a part of a story, taken somewhere out of the middle, hence its incompleteness.

" John in irritated state of mind meets Mary—High Street—Mary cuts or snubs him—John thinks because of call on Bensons—(knows Mary dislikes Gabrielle Benson, and has a jealous side to nature). Mary, however, cares nothing about Bensons, is really angry because

she thinks John, as director of the Dernmore Company, ought not to have allowed her brother to be dismissed."

In the above will be seen some of the points of difference. A draft follows the form of the story that is to be told; it is an attempt to write the actual words that will be used. A synopsis is the plan, not only of what is to be revealed to the reader, but of the incidents behind the scenes.

Thus in all three drafts of this story Mary's action is presented as caused by an incident that is revealed to the reader, whereas all the time the author's real plan is that it has been caused by an incident which, whether understood by the reader or not, the author elects to keep out of sight.

The Beginner and the Synopsis.

A synopsis, or general plan of a story, or an article, is always useful. But it must be recognized that there are many people—even experienced writers—who find synopsis-making the most difficult task they can undertake.

This does not mean that they cannot form a coherent plan, but rather that they form such a plan subconsciously, and only in the action of writing can they induce their minds to unravel the plot.

Many beginners are painfully troubled with this difficulty, but to their case is also added the difficulty of forming sentences with anything like ease.

Hence the suggestion that the beginner should boldly start with very brief sentences, each as complete in itself as possible, and each a part of the narrative or argument.

There is no reason whatever why a complete story should not be written in this way. More than this, there is no necessity for the writer to complete one particular

part before he passes to another. He may write his story by putting down all the incidents as they come to him, all the remarks, all the descriptions, in any kind of order he likes, cutting them up and re-arranging them.

One well-known playwright always uses thin cards of the kind used in card indexes. On these he jots down all the different clever things he thinks of, one speech (as far as possible) on each card. He does not trouble in the first place about order.

Presently, when he has a good many written, and a general plan fairly clear in his mind, he begins arranging them in order. Soon he is able to separate groups of cards into Act 1, Act 2, and Act 3.

Other speeches, situations, and ideas occur. New cards are written and placed more or less roughly into position.

Something of the same plan can be applied to other kinds of writing. But it may be found that manuscript paper is rather more useful than pieces of cardboard, even if slips have to be cut up and pasted into place.

Small Sheets of Paper.

A useful hint, however, may be, not to crowd your pages. Use small size paper to begin—say exercise book size, that which is described as “sermon-note.”

Even on the second draft, be content to use paper rather lavishly: a paragraph of six, eight, or ten lines is sufficient for one page.

This plan will facilitate changes. The writer who, reading through his draft, declares “I ought to have put that fourth paragraph before the third,” has only to change the order of the pages, and the deed is done.

Take Care of the Sentences : the Plan will Take Care of Itself.

It may seem a chaotic piece of advice to the beginner, to tell him not to worry too much about the plan, but to get his sentences complete and convincing. Yet this is really sound advice.

In writing, it is detail, detail, detail all the time—that tells. Each sentence, in itself, should be pleasing: each paragraph, in itself, should be convincing. When you have made the separate parts you wish to include, satisfactory enough, almost to stand alone, you have a number of parts which can be very easily welded together into a continuous whole.

The “sentence” is the great fact in all writing, and upon the sentence the author should concentrate his ability. The chief charm of most of our best authors, lies in the fact that almost any sentence can be taken out of a book and found to be a thing of beauty or interest in itself. Great books are rarely like Rodin statues, ugly in the detail and magnificent in the mass. They are more like pre-Raphaelite work, perfect in the little points even if they bewilder the impressionist gazer.

Make your sentences as perfect as possible. Hunt for the right word: feel for the music of sound: try to get every phrase good enough to be quoted.

It is admitted here that there are some writers who are quite popular, who can write a thrilling story or a splendid article, whose sentences may not be able to stand analysis. As an example, there was the late Professor Drummond, who had a great vogue twenty or thirty years ago. Strict masters of English quarrelled with his style, and probably they had ample cause for dissatisfaction. The man who commenced his most important work with the statement “Natural law is a

new word," when a child could have told him it was two words and not one, was capable of much.

But there is forcefulness in every one of his sentences, and this is a charm even greater at times than grammar.

A well-known writer of thrills, whose output during the War must have been stupendous, staggers the critic with his English, and with the unvarying success with which he manages to get a comma after "I" every time he uses the first personal pronoun. But there is strength in his sentences—the vigour of a strenuous personality.

So, we do not plead for a sentence that can be parsed, but a sentence that has some quality or charm. If it pleases the ear, there are times when it is right to defy the rules of grammar—the poet is always greater than the grammarian, as speech is greater than the rules about speech. But some quality, distinctive, vivid, inspiring, or abrupt must justify originality where rules are concerned.

The Grammarian Critic.

And here a serious warning is uttered against the pedant. If you are uncertain about grammatical customs, it may be wise to take lessons—but do not make your literary work a part of your lesson. Journalism and authorship should always be free and unrestrained expressions of the powers a man possesses, not cramped endeavours after attainments he hopes to possess.

Sometimes it is wise to let a friend glance through your manuscript to help you to avoid any very glaring blunder. But, in choosing such an ally, do not select one of those nervous slaves of rules and precedents who know all the rules so thoroughly that they are themselves afraid to write a single sentence for fear of breaking one of them.

It may be a revelation to many people to know that the master grammarian is often almost unable to write because of the perils he sees lurking around every part of speech, and taking pot-shots at him from every verb word inflected into a substantive. He is the luckless kind of person who hits upon the occasional exception, in which an infinitive must be split in order to retain the sense.

Like the blacksmith who cured cataract of the eye with his powerful fingers, but who never dared to perform another operation after some medical men had paid for his course in medicine, the pedant's knowledge is not always useful for executive work.

If one of them gets hold of a beginner's manuscript and "helps" him with the grammar, it may dishearten a really hopeful writer. As a rule, in writing for the press, the advice that is most helpful is that of people who themselves have work to show in printer's ink.

Presenting an Argument.

Telling a story is often easier than stating an argument. The beginner at writing, who has seen Mr. Hickling's motor car plough its way through the buckets and watering cans outside Reiley's Ironmongery Stores, has a simpler task than he would have were he to set out to argue that "the effect of picture palaces is to destroy imagination."

The beginner may feel himself incapable of suggesting the tintinabulation of falling buckets, and the chortling growls of the motor, in the actual language of his story. But, point by point, he can describe things seen, things heard, and things felt. The short sentence method indicated in Chapter II would enable him to make some kind of clear statement, and, for arrangement, he has but to follow the order of events as they occurred.

But when he has to present an argument, however simple that argument may be, he becomes involved in a task that seems to need another set of mental qualities.

In the one case there is straightforward statement of incident : in the other he has to deal with opinion, illustration, evidence, inference, and proof. In consequence his arrangement can easily lack order.

But the short sentence method is just as suitable for presenting arguments as for narratives. It scarcely matters how difficult it may be for the young writer to think and reason in an orderly manner if he uses this method, for it helps him to manage without any plan at all until most of his work has been done.

Now let us suppose that our beginner wants to write an article on the subject just named : " Do Moving Pictures Destroy Imagination ? "

He takes up his pen. Right away, he is stopped by that tiresome wonder : " How shall I begin ? "

Soon he discovers that to arrange the order of his argument at the same time as he is writing the sentence, is very difficult, and the double effort tempts his mind into a tangle. He finds that he is attempting to prove a case he has not yet stated, or to state conclusions before he has submitted evidence. More than this, he fears that his sentences are awkward and that they do not follow on, because, while he is absorbed in the arrangement, he cannot give attention to the choice of words.

Let him adopt the short sentence plan, and at once his task becomes easier. He can write little bunches of words, one after another, as they occur to him, giving each little sentence a line to itself and commencing each with a capital letter and ending with a full stop.

As far as possible he should let related sentences follow one another, but he need not do this when it

becomes irksome or difficult, or when he begins to feel that he is thinking too much about order and not enough about subject-matter.

In using this method, he can put down everything likely to help him or likely to fit in with the argument, just as it comes to the mind. One point will suggest another, so down it goes on paper. Sometimes he will repeat himself, but repetition does not matter at this stage.

When everything that he can think of has been thus transferred to paper, our beginner has a rough series of brief sentences, rather mixed up and confused, but falling into little bunches or groups.

A few snips with a pair of scissors, a re-arrangement of the resultant slips of paper, and almost before he is aware the argument forms itself into some rough kind of order.

An Illustration.

To illustrate this method, we will take a few sentences that might occur to a writer on such a subject as indicated. We put them down in the order in which they might leap into the mind. (It will be understood, of course, that the opinions are not necessarily those of the author of this book.) The argument is merely intended to illustrate a method of writing. Hence it is convenient to assume that our beginner wishes to emphasize some objections to moving pictures.

For convenience the sentences are numbered—

1. Pictures are a series of flickers.
2. This flickering must strain the eyes.
3. The nerves of the eyes are very sensitive.
4. Poets are noted for their imagination.
5. Poets love solitude.
6. One poet wrote in a darkened room with no furniture or ornaments.

7. Absence of distracting matters helped reflection.
8. Pictures show the world before your eyes.
9. Everything that happens can be shown on the screen.
10. What cannot be photographed can be reconstructed.
11. The Japan earthquake was shown in this way.
12. So was the siege of Port Arthur.
13. Children's minds create their own worlds.
14. Walk with a child through an English wood.
15. "There are bears in this wood," says the child.
16. "There is a magician's castle beyond the trees," says the child.
17. But will the children of the future have such powers?
18. When everything is made real for him, need the child's mind create its own wonders?

Now, here, are eighteen crude sentences written down at random; we presume they are written before even the writer troubles to decide how to begin his argument or in what way to arrange its order. Just as the ideas dart into his mind he puts them down on paper.

Space does not allow of more than these few sentences, and they suffice for our purpose. Probably for a thousand-word article, fifty, sixty, or a hundred sentences might be written in this haphazard manner before any definite attempt at arrangement need be made.

These eighteen sentences fall naturally into four groups, and would be divided after sentences 3, 7, and 12. Fifty or a hundred sentences could be divided in the same way into ten, fifteen, or twenty groups, the re-arrangement of which would be exceedingly easy.

We will presume that our beginner finds he has twenty pieces of paper, on each of which is an argument, a point, an illustration, or an idea. In arranging the sequence of these slips, he soon finds that some naturally fall together, and when at last he comes to the final arrangement of order, he may find that he has as few as three or four series to shuffle into position.

Thus is the plan arranged: thus is most of the writing

done. Out of a thousand words, six hundred may be already written in this way.

The effect so far is broken and disjointed. There are blank spaces to fill, breaks in the sequence and connection. But these can be filled more easily than the first sentences were written, because their subject matter is suggested by the points they unite. Illustrations and new arguments, too, are suggested in the same way.

When these blank spaces are filled there remains the task of linking up the short sentences into easy reading matter as already described, and beyond that the work (pleasant or irksome according to the mind of the writer) of polishing, of substituting pleasing words for those which are not happily chosen, and of adding force and vigour in any way that comes to the mind.

Important Note.

The method outlined in this and the preceding chapter, is intended to be of use to the beginner, or to those who find difficulty in the formation of words into sentences, and sentences into arguments.

Those who have gone beyond this stage and who can write complete paragraphs with comparative ease, will not find it necessary to go back to such an early plan. But even these writers may find it useful to complete the separate parts of an argument before they trouble their minds as to the order in which those parts shall be arranged.

The advice to write the article before arranging its order is given with some degree of reserve, as it is not suitable for all people. There are many able publicists who cannot work in this way: they find that a brief plan, as short and sharp, perhaps, as a proposition of

Euclid, is necessary before the actual work of writing can be begun.

Should any beginner find that his mind works in this way, he is wise to follow his natural bent and make his synopsis first. The advice is really intended to help that far larger class who cannot plan what has not been written.

CHAPTER IV

THE USE OF METAPHOR AND ILLUSTRATIVE LANGUAGE

GREAT writers use simple language. The beginner is often advised to copy the method, and the advice is good. But the beginner, in his anxiety to do so, sometimes finds that simplicity in his unskilled hands becomes "baldness." His sentences seem dull and cold, lacking both fire and conviction.

This is frequently because one important method of the able writer is overlooked : the use of metaphor and illustrative words.

When an important actor or actress occupies the centre of the stage, the view from the auditorium can be assisted by the use of strong flares of limelight thrown from the wings or other parts of the house upon the performer. The good writer relies on somewhat similar assistance : he may use words that are simple and direct, but very often these words do a double duty ; they emphasize the meaning by introducing an entirely separate and yet an entirely helpful idea.

Examine these phrases—

1. " He had a strong will."
2. " He had an iron will."
3. " His will was adamant."
4. " He had an inflexible will."

They are all hackneyed phrases, and as such they are not recommended. But here they serve a purpose in illustrating an important point.

The beginner, trying to write as Shakespeare or

Goldsmith would write, chooses the first of the four. He reasons that simple language is the most forceful language, and nothing can be better than the use of the simple, direct adjective "strong." He writes his whole story or article in this way, and at the end is disappointed to realize that the result is about as interesting as a trader's price list.

Another beginner, rather more careless about ideals or, perhaps, inclined to snatch at ready-made phrases, introduces the idea of "iron" or "adamant" or "inflexibility," and somehow or other achieves a better general result.

Why?

The reason lies in the fact that the second, third, and fourth phrases have a virtue that is not to be found in the words: "He had a strong will." This is the virtue of illustration, of using something from outside to make the argument more clear and more striking. They do not leave the actor in the centre of the stage to make out his case by his own ability: they bring sidelights to bear upon him and throw him into bolder relief of light and shadow.

By introducing the word "iron" or "adamant," the mind of the reader is at once assisted by an impression of a definite kind of strength. Memory cells are stirred; the brain is commanded to think of all the resistance, durability, and hardness that there is in "iron" or "adamant."

Similarly, by the use of the word "inflexible," the reader is made to think of those things that are not easily shaken, that do not bend or sway, that retain rigidity.

There is no need for us to go deeply into psychological reasons for this being a better method. No doubt a student of the human mind could explain why the mind

is helped by analogy and metaphor: the author can content himself with the fact that it is so.

To say that "a man's will is strong," is like putting an actor on a half-darkened stage; to say that "his will is like iron," is to throw limelight upon him.

It may seem strange that the best way of describing anything should be to say that it is like something else. Yet here is the whole idea of metaphor in a nutshell. The highest truths are told us in the form of parables; the lesson that comes in story garb grips the mind quicker and better than the lesson presented as a formula. As Tennyson declares—

"Where truth in closest words shall fail,
The truth embodied as a tale,
Shall enter in at lowly doors."

We understand the value of illustrative speech when the illustration is an anecdote or a word picture that claims the attention for so many seconds or minutes of time, and thus leads the attention onward to the point to be proved.

Byron, showing how Henry Kirke White's own brilliance and devotion to work caused his early death, enforced the argument by the bold analogy of the eagle being brought down by an arrow, that had been sped by a feather the eagle himself had dropped. The ancient poet pictured the movement and vigour of sunlight as a chariot race. Shakespeare made the evil suggestions of ambition take form as witches. R. L. Stevenson saw the struggles of man's dual nature as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

These are metaphors in their broadest use. To illustrate a point by telling a story is a sound method, and the beginner is often prepared to do this. But frequently he overlooks the fact that the master writer

not only uses metaphor in this narrative manner, but selects words that carry the same spirit into the separate sentences.

Adjectives.

This is particularly noticeable, as has already been indicated, in the use of adjectives. The good writer uses a sound adjective—the creative writer uses one that is suggestive or, better still, an adjective that sets the mind of the reader to work and forces him to look at the subject from a slightly altered angle.

Let us take Gray as a sound writer. As an exercise read *The Elegy*, stopping at each adjective to notice its aptness and precision. In every case the noun is accurately placed, measured, and defined by the adjective that goes with it: "parting day," "lowing herd," "glimmering landscape," "beetle's droning flight," "rugged elms," "blazing hearth," "envied kiss," "long-drawn aisle," "fretted vault," "storied urn," "animated bust," "fleeting breath."

One could go through this poem and hold oneself a bit of a genius if one could find an improvement on any adjective. Always the word fits its noun like a glove.

Yet *The Elegy* leaves us cold. It is largely a collection of rather obvious truisms indicating little insight or inspiration. Its precision is photographic, and its accuracy is appalling.

Gray was a sound writer, using words in their cold, direct meaning. By industry and untiring patience he achieved his masterpiece. His choice of adjectives is one of the most amazing feats in literature.

But greater writers than Gray have usually found that the adjective is not so much a chance for pleasing the sense of exactness, as it is an opportunity for

stirring the mind of the reader into activity, and for throwing a sidelight upon the subject in hand. The adjective itself becomes a metaphor, a comparison, a parable, and an illustration.

Gray used the adjective as an extra adornment for the actor: the creative writer uses it as a sidelight, to gain the advantage of triangular effects.

Read *Rabbi Ben Ezra* of Browning. Notice how few adjectives there are—but every one of them, instead of being apt and precise, is just a little strange and unexpected: “figured flame” (a star), “the vulgar mass called work,” “the world’s coarse thumb,” “instincts immature,” “purposes unsure,” “plastic circumstance,” “laughing loves,” “order grim,” “sterner stress,” “consummate cup.”

Nearly all these adjectives carry an idea just a little foreign to the noun, and the mind has to dart around to find the reason for their use. This exercise results in an added strength being given to the whole phrase.

The beginner is right when he prefers “an inflexible will” to “a strong will.” He is only wrong in using a hackneyed phrase. The effect on the mind of the reader is spoilt, simply because the beginner has not taken the trouble to add freshness to his metaphor.

So far we have dealt with the idea of metaphor and illustrative language as applied to the words that form the sentences. The beginner should note that every word in a sentence can do its part in the work of presenting a clear picture.

But it may not be wise for the would-be writer to dwell too long upon this fact, once it has been absorbed. A writer must be bold and dashing as soon as he has got some proficiency with the pen, and in halting at every word to be sure it is right, he may get out of his stride. In the actual work of writing it is often a good thing,

instead of boggling over a faulty sentence, to dash down on paper the language that seems to fit, and come back to it afterwards for a final touch-up.

The real point aimed at here is to impress upon the beginner that an adjective in creative writing is not so much a qualification of a noun, as a dose of dynamite for the reader's mind, something to rouse him, make him sit up and take notice.

Descriptions.

We pass on now to illustrative writing in its larger sense.

The beginner, in trying to describe a person, place, or action, is often apt to rely too much upon direct powers of description. The practised writer adopts a simpler plan: he picks out a suitable object or fact that resembles or suggests what is in his mind and uses it.

Take H. G. Wells' description of Rusper, the iron-monger. How simply is this man described. Mr. Rusper had a defect of the palate that "gave his lightest word a charm and interest for Mr. Polly. It caused a clicking sound as though he had something between a giggle and a gas-meter at work in his neck."

Also "Rusper's head was the most egg-shaped head he had ever seen."

There are writers who could have filled pages describing the visible Rusper and have missed him by miles; but "egg-shaped" head and "giggle and gas-meter" infirmity of voice get there right away—one can picture the man. Allow for the fact that the author aimed at a humorous effect, and there yet remain the deftness and skill with which the ironmonger is described. To describe Rusper's head, Wells talked about something else: an egg.

Take another example. Goldsmith thus describes the village pastor—

As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form
Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.

How many sentences would some writers require to present the bold majestic picture made clear in this illustration? One gets the vision of serenity, strength, endurance, and triumph over adversity. True, the words might have seemed more apt as applying to a man great in the affairs of the world, than to a country clergyman "passing rich on forty pounds a year," but there is no doubt of the force of the simile or the clearness of the resultant picture in the reader's mind.

"Bulls."

The practised speaker on the platform knows that one of the best ways of enforcing a point or of making an argument plain to his listeners, is by the use of anecdotes or of illustrative metaphors. He knows also that he must use these with some reserve so as to be effective, and to get one simile out of the way before he ventures on another.

This last act is important both in speech and in writing. What we call an Irish bull is usually the result of more than one illustrative simile coming to the mind at the same time. "I smell a rat, I see it floating in the air before me, but I'll nip it in the bud" presents three separate ideas, each conceivably helpful, but all hurled at us in a sentence, ridiculous and scattering.

A somewhat disintegrated political party on the eve of a general election may have many reasons put to it, as to why small differences of opinion should be

forgotten. But the clarion cry from a strong leader, "Close up the ranks," possibly achieves more than all other arguments, because that one simile presents the main arguments in their simplest and clearest form. A picture is presented of the grim battlefield in which the destiny of a nation may depend upon the unbroken front of a single army.

A phrase of four words like this is not four words of argument—it is a whole library of arguments. There are volumes of history gathered into the sentence.

CHAPTER V

THE FORMATION OF STYLE

MANY people advise the beginner to form a style. The advice is excellent, but usually bewildering, because it is rather doubtful if any two people quite agree in defining what the advice means, or what steps should be taken in order to carry the advice into effect.

Hence, in this book, the author takes the liberty to vary the advice, and suggests: "Study the work of stylists but let your own style form itself."

There are many reasons for taking this line. The chief of them is that the new writer should take his work simply and not bother himself, at the start, by trying to do too many things at once.

The subject of style is referred to thus early in this book, only because most people expect to find some reference to it near the beginning of such a work. In view of this expectation it seems right, at this place, to point out some useful facts.

The great writer is usually a stylist. That is to say, his writings have distinct qualities which appeal to the reader and command attention, arousing sympathy, agreement, indignation, protest, and similar strong feelings.

Why?

In nearly all cases the reason lies in the character of the man, more than in the method of his writing. Style is really the language of personality, the revelation of the man himself. The dream that anyone can learn to write like Shakespeare or Burns or Browning, like Dickens

or Hardy or Wells, by merely copying the method of expression, is a foolish dream.

The basis of all style is character. The triumph of style is when the writer is able to use words and sentences in such a bold and simple way, that he can make them servants instead of masters ; and group them in such a manner, that his own sheer strength and forcefulness give life to every syllable.

Style is really the expression of personality. If a man has not a striking character he can scarcely expect to write in a striking manner. Hence, "formation of style" really drives deeper than any playing about with words and phrases ; it means nothing more or less than personality and character formation.

Style is not necessarily of any special nature. Browning had strength in his writing because his own character was strong. But strength of character is not an essential. Edgar Allan Poe was a weakling. Style with him meant the fevered brilliance of imagination and the unfalteringly accurate ear of the musician.

What is true of men of outstanding qualities is also true of those who have less mountainous natures. The person who has no abilities of remarkable or unusual calibre, can none the less become a quite pleasing stylist to some audience or other. It is to be feared that this will not be done by copying or manufacturing external methods. It will be better done by discovering simple ways of self-expression.

Learning "Style."

Learning "style" is not learning how to dress up ; it is rather more like learning how to uncover : not how to act, but how to be natural ; not how to twist words and sentences into curious shape, but how to make words and sentences so transparent that one's own

vision and one's own understanding can be seen through them.

In these times we are learning that a tramp, who shows us how a tramp looks on life, can interest and charm us. He does it by taking us right into his thoughts and by letting us look through his eyes. A factory girl may become a good stylist to-day ; but she will do it better and do it easier by being herself, than by trying to mince her language or copy some other pattern of speech.

Some really excellent literature is being given to us nowadays in the cheap periodicals : many girls' and women's papers are particularly noteworthy. In reading the best of these one is often struck with the intense fidelity of the writer to her own thoughts and aspirations. Narrow views and opinions, trivial conceptions, may be here, yet among them some of those splendid visions that come to the humblest, shine out with brightness. The style of much of this work is splendid because it is sincere : occasionally it is the production of one who is capable of even better writing and who will some day reach a wider audience ; but often it is the work of one who will climb no higher, whose life is small and narrow, whose experience is limited, and whose horizon is material and circumscribed.

Personality and Style.

As suggested, style is largely effective self-expression. Character is the foundation of style, but one cannot possess a powerful style merely because one has a powerful personality. If the possession of the necessary character were all, Cromwell would have been a finer poet than Milton, and Bismarck, a greater writer than Goethe. There are now, and always have been, men and women of outstanding personality who are almost

inarticulate, or who use speech with about as much ability as a coal-heaver would perform an operation for appendicitis.

The writer who desires to form a style, however, should not leave his own personal nature and capacity out of the question. His real problem is : " How shall I use the pen, so that I get something of myself into all that I write ? "

There are three important acts he can perform. Between them they cover all the years of his work, and in consequence they are to be remembered as constant aims, rather than studied as special lessons—

1. He should obtain facility in the use of words.
2. He should study the technique of writing, that is to say, master the contrivances, rules, and customs by which words can be used to their best advantage.
3. He should try to write as the blacksmith strikes a blow, that is, put his own weight as well as the weight of the hammer into the stroke.

Facility in the Use of Words.

As regards the first of these : gaining facility in the use of words.

The beginner at the piano may like to put feeling into a five-finger exercise, or into hammering out a melody with one hand on the piano. But if he would give his love of sympathetic and moving music its fullest scope, he will try to do better than five-finger exercises, and will also learn to play with two hands, appreciating harmony as well as melody.

Style by all means, from the beginning, if it is desired. But more important as a lesson in the early stages is to learn how to write swiftly and easily and also to gain a wide vocabulary. Style by all means, but also, as a help to style, learn to pass the journalist's test. This is,

try to write one thousand words on any given subject in one hour.

By the way, this is a useful, practical plan, and should be carried out at intervals, say, once a week, while you are studying how to become a writer—

Write down the names of about twenty, thirty, or forty subjects of which you have some slight knowledge or about which information is easily available. Write these upon separate slips. Put these slips into a drawer or bag and keep them handy.

A little later, with the clock well in view, and pens, ink, and paper ready to hand, pick out one of these slips and forthwith set out to write one thousand words about the subject it names.

As a variation, allow yourself two hours, one for research, inquiry, thought, and plan, and the second for the actual work of writing.

And here, a word or two should be devoted to the deplorable fallacy that "too much writing spoils the style."

No greater mistake can be made than this. The more writing the better. Facility in using the pen comes chiefly by practice.

There is an idea current among some people, that the output of large quantities of loosely constructed matter is injurious to the would-be author. One dare not make sweeping statements in dealing with such an opinion, as it is probable that here and there there are men and women who have started with fine aspirations, and lost them in consequence of writing reams of bald journalese, in a mechanical manner, for years.

But even in these cases the damage is psychological rather than technical. Very few people can regain a lost vision, and thinking nothing but commonplace thoughts for years can spoil the imagination.

In the majority of cases the larger the output the better. Lying on the bookstalls are hundreds of weekly and monthly periodicals, many of them cheap in price and apparently cheap in substance.

It is by no means always true that these are written by people who cannot do better work. These papers are often the practice ground and nursery of authors whose names later become famous.

"How shall I produce a popular novel?" asked an aspirant of a well-known author.

"Write and sell two or three thousand words a day for twenty years" was the reply—a good reply, too.

The violinist gets facility by practice. The pen is a much more difficult instrument than the violin and takes more pains and longer practice for complete mastery. The golden rule in both cases is "practice."

The Technique of Writing.

The second essential, mastering the technique of writing, is referred to rather fully in the next chapter. An artist, learning the technical acts of drawing and painting, is usually taught by being shown the way in which necessary effects are obtained.

In a similar manner the would-be author can best learn the contrivances, means, and mechanism of his art, by studying the works of others.

Self-expression.

We now come to the third point, which is perhaps the most important of all, in the formation of style: this is getting a bit of oneself into one's work.

It is surprising how many people there are whose whole manner changes the moment they take a pen in hand. They do not think freely. If a simple, sound

sentence comes to the mind, the pen gets hold of that sentence and changes it into a stilted formula.

Taking up the pen affects many people in the same way as putting on their best Sunday clothes. Easiness of self-expression gives way to stiffness.

The beginner may think that this restraint is a temporary disability which will wear off in the course of a few months. In many cases this may be so, but in a great many more the tendency of the writer is to release himself from one kind of bondage in order to be stronger bound by another.

A writer may take a pattern that is easy to copy and learn the little mannerisms and tricks that belong to it, and, as facility in its use increases, may hesitate to alter his methods.

An illustration of this danger lies in the kind of composition that was at one time described as "journalese." (The name is scarcely a fair one now, because the great London papers set a high value on originality in writing, and other papers follow. One London evening paper, for example, has reported police-court news in quite pleasing verse.)

Journalese was a "knack" rather than a method. It had rules and laws of its own. For example: the first time you wrote the word it was "oyster," the second time "shell fish," and the third "succulent bivalve." No word was to be repeated within, say, an inch. Also, short paragraphs began with a verb, as: "Going to work yesterday morning . . .," or "Balancing a pot of paint on his ladder . . ."

Journalese is one of the hardest kinds of bondage from which to escape. The high-school equivalent to "polished literature" is probably another.

Learning a style really means learning to fling off such shackles and be free.

The following incident that occurred in the hearing of the writer of this book is illuminating—

Some schoolboys had been told a story at school, and allowed to pencil down notes of the plot and incidents. As a home exercise each boy was to rewrite that story in his own language.

(This, by the way, is a splendid kind of school home work.)

One boy's paper was "corrected" by the master—

"I notice you use the word 'big'" he said. "'Big' is not a nice word to use in writing. You should make it 'large.' Also, a little further on you have the words 'she was crying.' That is not at all a nice phrase to put on paper; 'she was shedding tears,' or 'she was weeping,' would be a far more literary form."

Fancy! An honest word like "big," not fit for the dignity of story writing; "she was crying," too simple for the glory of authorship!

This instructor was quite sincere. He was one of many who think that written English and spoken English are two different things; that a "rat" becomes a "rodent" as soon as you put it on paper, and a "horse" changes into an "equestrian quadruped" the moment it smells printer's ink.

The stylist is usually the man who smashes away all this nonsense and writes as he feels. When he means "mutton" he writes "mutton," and if he finds the printer's reader has altered it to "elderly lamb," pitches out the correction and replaces the more robust word.

This does not mean that the stylist has no sense of music or rhythm or melody. Often he has keen delight in the roll of succeeding "r's," the rich fluency of open vowels and the dainty insistence of alliterative sequence. But, where there is force of character, there is nearly always the courage of sincerity. A spade is called a spade.

CHAPTER VI

THE WRITER'S BOOKSHELF

HERE is a good exercise : Ask a friend to be your examiner, and arm him with one of those excellent books of familiar quotations which several publishers issue.

Let him pick out phrases and sentences, avoiding those that are too well-known, and see if you can name the author of each.

It is a surprisingly easy game to those who are fairly well read, and who have a grasp of the separate styles of many popular writers. The point is, not to remember the quotation, but to be able to state, from its literary form, the author who most likely wrote it.

Some writers are unmistakable : these are chiefly poets. Browning, Pope, and Byron are these writers, for example, who give themselves away in every paragraph. Prose writers are a little more difficult, but Wells, Chesterton, and several of the modern writers are recognizable by a phrase.

Some little while ago a bold appeal for subscriptions to a building loan, flamed across the unfinished Council Hall by Westminster Bridge, London. Its mighty letters were easily readable from the embankment.

The progressive person who phrased it, misled by the apt use of quotations in other advertisements, and apparently unable to find one that was suitable, did next best. He concocted a quotation of his own, something about " Our Empire is in England's homes." As a quotation almost necessitates the name of a famous poet or prose author, he added the name " Byron " to the dose of unction and let it go at that.

The words appalled the literary and the critical.

They read them uneasily and with perplexed brows, as not daring to think. Subconsciously they knew that Byron never wrote as those words ran, but against this they reasoned that Byron wrote much in his childhood, and also, that he sometimes wrote under the influence of liquor. So they held their peace, wondering what fearsome work of his might have been unearthed.

But one day a question was asked in the House of Commons about it. Uneasiness found voice : a member humbly inquired " Where is the quotation to be found ? "

The answer was ludicrous. It was to the effect that the words formed an intelligent generalization of the Byronesque sentiment, or something of that sort.

The answer and the quotation were, of course, sheer nonsense. Byron may not have been a great poet but he was a convincing stylist. Every line he published is branded and is obviously his own. Every word, as he used it, had its own significance. There was never a domestic application in the grandiose manner in which Byron would use such a word as " empire." He might use it as a blaze or a brick-bat or a boast, but his use would never fit a building scheme or an appeal for funds.

The distinguished writer is as distinguished in the sentence as in the sonnet. He is as characteristic in the paragraph as in the portfolio. He gets down to details, and those who desire to study the technique of good writing can hardly do better than analyze the detail work of famous authors.

The first effect of such a study should be the absolute abandonment of the most dangerous trick a writer can acquire. This is the habit (as Arnold Bennett once aptly described it) of composing in phrases instead of composing in words.

For example, the word " glare " is a good word ; there

is no need to put "ruddy" before it every time. A "moment" is a definite period. There are exciting moments; there are thrilling moments; there are moments of pity, pain, and passion; moments, too, of penury, perniciousness, and peculiarity. Many new writers have overlooked these facts and only recognize one kind of moment. This is the "psychological" moment, and they drag it in every fourth page.

Teeth are all the better for being white. "White" is a sound word, but it is too vague; there is the whiteness of snow and the whiteness of blotting paper. These and other kinds of whiteness do not satisfy the conventional writer. The teeth have to be pearl-white.

Why must a stare be "haughty"? Why must a glint be "steely," tresses be "raven," and gold be "burnished"? If two words must always go together, Lewis Carroll's hint should be acted upon and our dictionary add such novelties as psychoment, pearlite, staraughty, steglint, traven, and goldurnish.

The constantly repeated phrase is usually an excellent phrase. That is why it is so frequently borrowed by other writers. But from the point of view of the reader the second-hand expression simply carries the weight of a single word.

It was a happy inspiration, for example, to use the phrase, "the acid test," as related to non-material things. The phrase is clever, and the picture summoned to the mind at the first place of reading is helpful. The knowledge of how acid is applied in order to test precious metals helps the imagination when the word is applied to evidences or consequences. But when one has met the phrase many times the picture of the chemist testing gold fades away, and "acid test" means no more to the ear than the word "test" standing alone. It only takes longer to write and occupies more space.

Make Your Own Phrases.

The aim of the young writer should be to make his own phrases. If any quoting or repetition is done, let others do it. Frequently he will come to places in which it may be difficult to avoid a hackneyed combination of words. He writes "She gazed at him with a cold stare"; he alters this to "a frigid stare," and finds the one conjunction of words is just as common as the other, so uses the handier of the two, and gets on to the next sentence. A better action would be to try and present the idea in quite a different way, for it is not merely the adjective that is faulty here, but the whole sentence. At a low computation about five thousand heroines or lady villains gaze at someone with a cold or frigid stare annually. Editors grow weary of that stare, and blue pencil it or decline it with thanks. Editors and public would be grateful if the fact were sometimes presented as "her manner was not cordial," or "she embodied mute indignation," or "she appeared hostile," or "she angrily avoided him." These forms are not specially pleasing, but they vary the formula.

Books to Read.

The would-be author should find much help from other people's writings. His bookcase is really his best place of study.

The kind of books one should read is always a matter of individual choice and liking. It is rarely wise to make an unpleasant task of reading. The beginner who has favourite authors should not be afraid to saturate himself with their writings. He should make them a serious study during the time he is trying to increase his powers with the pen.

One beginner may wish to produce work that will compare with that of Joseph Conrad, Frank Norris, or

Winston Churchill ; another abominates such stuff and envies the powers of Ethel Dell or William Le Queux. One wishes to be a new Smollett ; another, to out-Tarzan the chronicler of apes. One prepares himself to step into Hardy's shoes ; another reads *Three Men in a Boat* as his pen's pattern.

It is for the writer to choose his own favourite authors. His taste may seem deplorable to the critic, but he is more likely to achieve some kind of success by aiming at a humble ideal that he really approves, than in taking pattern from masters whose work he does not appreciate.

The intention of this book is to aid the beginner to produce that kind of work for which there is a public and a demand. It might be a more laudable aim to make beginners eager to emulate Spenser and Homer, Cervantes and Shelley. But we live in a day when Ethel Dell is a best seller and Rice Burroughs can count a million readers.

Popularity does not prove genius—but popularity is a proof of some solid ability. The keen critic may suffer as he reads *The Rocks of Valpré*, and re-open *Kipps* to get the taste out of his mouth. But the kind of budding author who is fascinated by *The Rocks of Valpré*, and whose ambition to be a writer was first stirred by reading it, may never be able to write a book like *Kipps*. Why tell him to soak his ambition in H. G. Wells whom he may not appreciate, and neglect Ethel Dell whose work he loves ?

So let the aspirant's bookcase be chiefly the books he likes and would make his pattern. He will study them better if he loves them.

But, lest he move too much in one narrow circle, it is wise to add to these just a few others of a varied kind.

Poetry.

Those few should include poetry. A good start for this extra library is a popular book of famous poems, such as *A Thousand-and-one Gems of English Poetry*. It may be unnecessary to recommend such reading, as nearly all literary aspirants are poetry lovers. To read a brief poem now and again, however, is helpful.

In addition to shorter works the beginner should make at least one serious effort to realize the spirit and atmosphere of a great epic poem. For this purpose, Homer in Pope's translation is excellent; the first or second book of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and Marlowe's *Faustus* or Goethe's *Faust*, are suitable. If a more modern work is preferred, *The Idylls of the King* of Tennyson, or Browning's *Ring and the Book*, would be of value.

A serious effort at reading at least one long poem, is scarcely a complete effort unless it includes a deliberate endeavour to live right inside the poem for at least an hour or two on end.

Carlyle once said that the *Book of Job* should be read at a sitting, and this advice indicated a sound method for every great epic or drama. Such a poem as the first book of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, for example, becomes of incalculable value to a budding writer, once he has been able to forget it is a story and realize its powers to lift him into a new condition of feeling.

Early Novelists.

The next part of the young author's bookshelf might well be filled with some books from the first great age of English novelists. There is no need to read such a book right through, a half-hour or so spent in turning the pages of *Tom Jones* or *Tristram Shandy* gets the beginner into the age of the great beginning of modern fiction.

Dickens should be represented on that shelf.

American Fiction.

American fiction should find a place there. Mark Twain represents the vigour and vitality that are America's contribution to modern literature. Current American magazines should be also occasionally examined, not so much with the object of finding patterns, as with the desire to realize the possibilities of virility and freshness our language still holds.

First Novels.

The beginner should try to read two books of each well-known novelist. Those should be—(1) His first novel, and (2) his best novel or, if this is difficult to decide, one of his best.

First novels are useful, as in them the writer often does some of his best work, and also leaves some of the tools and shavings about, so that the student can easier follow his plan of operation. A beginner who might be entirely nonplussed by *Tono-Bungay* might conclude *The Time Machine* with the feeling "I believe I could write a book like that."

Modern Novels.

It is doubtful if the circulating library habit will greatly help the would-be writer. The seven-and-six-penny novel is not, as a rule, a reliable pattern, unless the student is careful to limit his reading of these to obvious best sellers. A great number of these books represent money spent rather than money earned. Often they are the fag-end productions of men and women who have made some kind of name and are working the remnants of the seam for all it is worth ; sometimes they are the writings of well-to-do people who use money and influence to thrust a novel upon the public. The beginner may write quite as good matter as many of

these and never find a publisher, simply because, without name or money, he is trying to compete with those who have both.

Story Papers and Magazines.

The popular story papers and magazines are far better patterns. The paper with a circulation of some hundreds of thousands a week demands newness, vigour, and life from its contributors. It may seem a bold statement, but it is none the less true, that the average merit of contributions to the popular papers of such a firm as the Amalgamated Press, Pearson's, or Newnes', is higher than the average of the novels issued by the seven-and-sixpenny Press.

It is possible to make many lists of selected works that could be read with profit. But the author refrains. Provided a reasonable width of subject and style is covered, the would-be writer should follow his own inclinations.

Chiefly read the books you like to read, and chiefly study the author you wish to copy, rival, or excel. There is plenty of hard work and plenty of swimming against the tide in trying to earn a living with the pen : hence, there is no need to manufacture difficulties, or do any deed that is unnecessarily distasteful. In all matters of taste and in all selections of subjects, patterns, and styles, take the path of least resistance and do what you wish to do.

To make this clearer : if you set out to write detective stories, because you like reading them, do not let anyone convince you that high-class love stories are more popular or more remunerative. If your inclination is towards humour, do not be induced to make your work deadly serious. Be yourself and trust to your own inclinations.

How to Read the Books.

It pays a would-be author to do a certain amount of slow reading. He should be careful to read at least his favourite authors in this way. It is not suggested that he should slow down his rate of reading throughout, but as an occasional exercise the method is helpful.

The advice is not necessary in all cases, because the endeavour to do constructive literary work sometimes changes a person's attitude towards printed sentences. A young man who passes noble buildings and stately architecture at a steady four miles an hour may change his speed to a snail's pace as soon as he becomes the pupil of an architect. Equally, the reader who can "do" a novel in two sittings may find the same book a refreshing week's study the moment he essays his first short story.

Quick readers are often attracted by the desire to write, and facility with the pen does not usually rob them of swiftness; but nearly always the practised writer can linger lovingly or dissectingly over paragraphs, much as an architect can analyze cornices and capitals.

The very swift reader who fails at writing is more likely to fail in the sentence than in the plot. Nearly always he will be hazy and sketchy where he should be clear and precise. The "idea" will be right: the treatment may be feeble.

Slow reading is not a perfect remedy, but it goes a long way towards the discovery of the remedy. When it is found that a clear picture of a heroine or the complete history of an ancestor can be presented in, say, twenty-four lines of print, it is quite worth while to read those twenty-four lines analytically in order to try and find out how it is done.

And this, after all, is one of the remarkable facts

about writing : there is nothing hidden. All the words and stops are there. One can read them aloud and catch the sounds of sibilants and gutturals, the music of contrast or alliteration ; one can see all the tricks of sentence building, for every result is on the surface.

Writing differs from such a task as that of the chemist. Two chemicals secretly compounded are mixed and an explosion or some other re-action results : the chemicals are secret or yield their secrets only to expert skill.

A man writes—

The night has a thousand eyes
And the day but one,
Yet the light of the whole world dies
With the setting sun.

The mind has a thousand eyes,
And the heart but one,
Yet the light of the whole life dies
When love is done.

And we marvel at the mystic crucibles of feeling that can create such a passionate and throbbing outburst in scarce fifty words.

But all the tools that are used are there : the words are in any dictionary : you or I or the man who folds this copy can pick them out and put them in some sequence and connection.

It must be admitted that slow reading and analysis will not create the soul of the poet in any man, but they will help any writer to use the poet's tools.

So, study the master's work : your own selected master's. He may be a master logician or a master of trite commonplace. He may excel in pure English prose or mawkish sentiment, but so long as he seems to you a desirable pattern, do not be afraid to study him in detail.

This advice is not given so that faulty methods of writing shall be perpetuated merely because they

attract a large public. A better object is in mind. Slow reading helps the student to see the weak points in the pattern as well as the strong. It is more than possible for a pupil to improve on his master.

Never let the critic and the pedant distort the obvious fact that a writer who attracts a large number of readers has some strong quality in his works. The critics may pull to pieces a book like *St Elmo* ; they may declaim at Le Queux's sentence construction, at Miss Corelli's unhuman persons, at Miss Dell's sameness of plot. But the million readers prove a virtue of some kind ; the admirer who reads slowly and with sincere approval may strengthen the virtues and even make the copy better than the sample.

Copying a Style.

If you have a favourite author, try to copy his style. Do it frankly. If you hesitate to do it with your own work, do it with someone else's.

To make this plainer.

Take a page of a well-known author and make out that some other author is lifting it and slightly altering it so as to fit one of his own books.

Here is a good sample exercise of the kind meant : Try to suppose that Mr. H. G. Wells, in making up *Kipps* for press, finds himself a page short, and so calmly " lifts " a page from W. W. Jacobs ; then, fearing detection or relenting at his evil deed, he re-writes the page in his own language.

Re-write that page !

Another example.

Take *The Times* leader and imagine you are G. K. Chesterton, rather exasperated and somewhat indignant ; because you have to re-write that leader in " G. K. C." style.

Write it !

This kind of thing is splendid practice.

Follow it up by taking a simple story such as *The Minstrel Boy* or *The Fox and the Grapes* or *Three Blind Mice* : make a list of six or eight famous writers and write the same story in the style of each.

CHAPTER VII

SELECTING THE MARKET

THERE are two ways of getting published. One is "Be a superlative genius" : the second is "Add a little commercial common sense to your ability with the pen."

Becoming a superlative genius is slow and tedious work. In consequence, most of us are driven back to the necessity for being "commercial."

The young author should endeavour to realize the "business" side of his work quite early. Producing books and papers is now a great industry and is worked on sane economic lines by men and women of ability and sound common sense.

These people—publishers and editors—make all kinds of allowances for the "artistic temperament." They are compassionate to contributors who seem to live in a remote dimension ; they know that a man who can excel in one ability may lack in another. But they are hard-working folk, and if Smith, who writes only passably, brings them the stuff they want, while Jones, who is much more trenchant and pleasing, insists on serving up a blank verse lament over Orion when they need a plain-spoken treatise on copper mines—Smith is likely to cash the cheque, while Jones searches his attic cupboard for crusts.

Do not blame the publisher or the editor. Most likely, if hard put to it, either one can produce an "artistic temperament" of his own, that he keeps in cold storage while he is trying to raise the circulation.

To succeed at the work of writing, try to drop the poetic frenzy and the divine afflatus and the literary

effulgence, for a few hours of cold commercial thinking now and again.

The advice is important, because the earnestness with which many quite capable writers send entirely unsuitable manuscripts to editors, is one of the marvels of the profession. A very high percentage of the stories and articles that reach the editor's office are so wide of the mark, that a child should be able to point out their unfitness.

The young author should try to put himself in the editor's place and see through his eyes. A glance at a bookstall reveals the fact that there are great differences between papers, and that different classes of readers are being catered for by different editors. The form, style, make-up, and matter of these papers do not differ by accident : there is evidence of deliberation and plan in every one of them.

More than this : every editor persists in a policy that makes his different issues resemble one another not merely in appearance, but in spirit and essence. The man who buys a morning newspaper likes it fresh and up-to-date every day, but he does not expect it to read like *The Daily Mail* one morning, *The Daily Chronicle* the next, and *The Daily News* the third. He expects a certain persistence and continuity that will form a harmonious sequence.

It is the same with other journals. People do not buy *The Grocer* with an expectant wonder as to whether this number will read like *Pearson's Weekly* or *The Graphic*. They buy *The Grocer* because they expect the experienced editor will give them reading matter bearing on points connected with the grocery trade, and in continuity of a known plan and policy.

The contributor who looks through a paper, should try to form a mental picture of the man who produces

that paper, to see him as a level-headed being who is catering for a section of humanity, and trying to give them the reading matter they expect.

A good exercise for a contributor is to examine a bookstall and select some paper to which he would like to contribute. We will presume that he selects *The Humorist*.

Let him get three or four recent numbers, and then try to imagine that Messrs. Newnes have wired to him in a hurry and told him he is to bring out the next number, and they would like to have a look at his plan, with a suggested list of articles.

The moment he begins to draft that plan, he will find that the back numbers materially assist him. By comparing one with another, he gets to realize the policy of the editor. If he has a sufficient number of back copies, he should be able to form an opinion as to the kind of material required to make up the next number.

We still further suppose that our amateur editor is informed that he need not trouble about the pictures as these have all been arranged for and the blocks are already made. He is told that the spaces he is expected to fill are exactly the same as those in the previous issue.

More than this, we presume that he is told that there is a skilled band of writers fully prepared to write the articles that he wants, and that all he has to do, in the first place, is to indicate subjects, length, method of treatment, and similar points.

It is admitted here that even this task, simple as it seems, would be quite beyond the ability of a large number of people. They would not know how to go to work; they would be puzzled how to plan a single page.

Such people are sadly handicapped as writers, because

it is evident that they can only think about "What I want to write," and are unable to see the case as "What people wish to read."

But there are others to whom such an invitation would come as a stimulus to sound and clear thinking.

"It is quite clear," some such person would begin, "that all the articles I suggest must be of the same kind as those that usually appear in the paper."

"It is clear that the paper has regular readers who will buy the next number because they liked the previous ones. This means that a story that would suit *The Schoolgirl's Own* or an article that would please the readers of *The Wireless Review*, would not do in this paper, because the readers may not be schoolgirls or wireless enthusiasts."

Putting Himself in the Editor's Place.

The man who thinks in this way is on right lines. He is beginning to look at contributions through the editor's eyes, and think as the editor thinks.

So we presume he begins to make a list of subjects and plan the next issue. If he has a number of old copies handy, he should be able to do this quite easily.

But almost certainly his first list will be stodgy and seem dull. There will be an unaccountable feeling that, though he may have indicated a plan remarkably similar to that of any preceding number, the programme fails somewhere.

The explanation may suggest itself to him in the single word "topical." Nowadays the editor of nearly every popular paper makes a great point of being topical. He knows that an article that would be just as suitable for one week as for another, usually lacks an essential quality. In his mind, the whole essence of periodical production is that each issue shall hitch on, as it were,

to the subjects and thoughts that are in the minds of the people on the day it appears.

The moment this fact is realized our amateur editor starts on a new plan. He seizes the daily papers, he looks at the calendar, he thinks about forthcoming events. He notes, for example, that his paper will be issued the morning of the cup final, and that thousands of readers, with their minds filled with thoughts of football, will be surprised if, out of all the papers, this one has no reference to the great event.

Searching the morning's news, he notes also that there are certain interesting items in the paper such, for example, as the claim of a Mexican farmer to be able to make diamonds ; the plan to build a new canal from the Severn to the Thames ; or the discovery of a marvellous Aztec temple.

These suggest suitable matter for his paper. Our experimenter has taken another step forward. He has begun to realize that an editor has usually certain definite aims in his mind when he starts out to plan his next number.

He may not be able to see all these aims or to appreciate some of the points that an experienced editor might regard as important, but at all events he will grasp this : that there is a reason why some articles and stories are accepted and others are declined.

That knowledge should help him to give the editor what he wants.

A writer who intends to contribute to a paper should always start by asking himself " What should I put in if I were the editor ? " When he has answered that question and made a list of subjects, he should go through that list and ask at least three questions about each separate proposal—

1. Is it the kind of matter that the readers of the paper would expect to find ?

2. Is it topical? That is to say, is it a subject that is likely to fit in with the topics that are in people's minds; and

3. Is it new?

With the first two points we have already dealt. A word or two should be spoken about the third.

New Subjects.

There are many subjects which are not fresh that are suitable for a paper. For example, it would be suitable to write on wireless for a wireless paper: the editor wants articles on the subject; in fact, his whole issue is filled with them; and the subject is highly topical. But the contributor who sends in an article on "How to make a wireless set, by buying the parts," would probably annoy the editor deeply, not because the subject would be unsuitable, but because it would have been already fully discussed.

Equally, when two royal weddings take place in close succession, a general article on "Some royal weddings of the past" just in time for the second event, would stand a poor chance of acceptance, because, in all probability, the editor would regard the general topic as stale. He would need special points, individualizing the second occurrence. He would himself be in a dilemma in the matter, probably anxious to treat it and to give space to it, but closely guarding against any risk of repeating the material of a few weeks back.

The subject that everyone has been discussing for weeks or months is obviously the subject that has been fully reviewed in the press. This is the kind of thing that attracts the new writer, but usually his contribution is returned.

The reason is that he is nearly always a day behind the fair. If the theme is of sudden, world-wide

importance, this man is competing with writers on the premises or on the scene, who are dashing off matter against time. Such staff-workers have, as it were, a new mine to dig in, and it hardly matters what they bring to the surface. But, as time goes on, though there may be much space still devoted to the theme in many papers, a closer search is made into each contribution in order to be sure it has sufficient freshness to justify publication.

A great event has usually three periods that affect the writer—

1. The "news" period, when the world is agog for telegrams and news. During this period the professional news-journalist is doing his part and, may be, the staff leader writer, with wet news slips before him, and with his eye on the clock, is writing against time.

2. The comment and general article period in papers of weekly and monthly productions. The wise contributor to these gets to work the moment he hears the news ; he selects his papers, and by telephone or wire lets the editors know that the article is coming.

3. The period of consequent articles. This may spread over days, weeks, or even months, according to how long the occurrence is kept alive in the public mind. The contributor, however, should get to work at the earliest possible moment and realize that the nearer he is to the event, the better his chance of selling his wares.

Thus, to take an example : A new secret society arises in a European country, and by a *coup d'état* the government is overwhelmed and the chief of the society establishes himself as dictator.

The first two periods of news and general comments naturally occupy the editor's mind and are dealt with swiftly, but, if the public give evidence that the affair is not a mere nine days' wonder, or if new and interesting

consequences arise, the editor wants more copy. He is not now interested in the same kind of general article that might have pleased him at first. He wants this subject dealt with from a new angle and in relation to other facts of life. The theme, in the broad, is no longer a good news peg, but the new facts about it, as they come to light, are quite good.

These three periods are indicated, but the outside contributor does wisely to give most of his attention to the second. If he intends to write articles for the press, the morning newspaper should be his gold mine, and he should learn to act swiftly and write his best at once.

The late Peter Keary, one of the founders of the Pearson group of papers, and joint-managing director of C. A. Pearson, Ltd., once told how he entered journalism.

He was then living in Liverpool, and read in the morning paper that there had been a terrible storm. On going to the Free Library he found there was a good deal of matter available on the subject of storms. Forthwith he wired, offering to send an article on the subject, to George Newnes, who had recently leapt into notice with his popular paper, *Tit-Bits*.

Back came a wire telling him to send the article. This was duly published.

Encouraged by his success, Peter Keary, then a mere boy, offered other articles, all highly topical and showing that he understood what *Tit-Bits* wanted. After a few weeks of this sort of thing, a visit to London was suggested. An interview followed, from which Peter Keary emerged as the first sub-editor of *Tit-Bits*.

A young man, to-day, could hardly follow on precisely similar lines. A wire from an unknown reader, hundreds of miles away, would bring a commissioned order in only quite exceptional cases. But the spirit of the method remains unchanged.

CHAPTER VIII

ARTICLE AND LEADER WRITING

As indicated in the previous chapter, there are two ways in which the article writer can proceed—

1. He can study the paper to which he decides to contribute, and choose the subject that will be likely to appeal to its editor for his next issue ; or

2. He can study the daily papers and decide which papers are suitable to write for, in view of the topics under public notice.

The two acts run into each other and become one : the business-like contributor gets in the way of understanding what each paper requires, and learns at the same time how to make an intelligent use of the series of subjects suggested by the latest news.

In this chapter we deal with the manner in which an article is written.

The contributor should always realize that there are two distinct kinds of articles used in papers. (*a*) There are those articles, paragraphs, and news items in which the opinions expressed are colourless and the subject is treated as a sheer matter of interest ; and (*b*) there are those contributions in which definite opinions are expressed, and the writer pleads a case.

Good examples of what is meant can be seen on the leader page of *The Daily Mail* and other newspapers. Immediately after the first column or so of advertisements, appear one, two, or more blocks of letterpress, usually set in large type or with white spaces between the lines. These are the leaders (originally " leadders," signifying that the spaces between the lines had been

widened, by inserting thin strips of lead between the lines of type).

In these articles are expressed the opinions of the paper upon the chief subjects of the day, and it is in these that the policy of the paper is declared.

In other columns upon the same page, will be found other articles, usually of an informing and interesting nature, sometimes indicating special research or inside knowledge. These, as a rule, have a relation to the events uppermost in people's minds, or indicate an intelligent guess at forthcoming themes.

In addition to these two classes of articles, there is a third class. It is nearly always signed, and it gives expression to opinions, which are not necessarily the opinions of the paper. The well-known publicist sometimes writes here, over his own name, views that are expressly countered in a leader on the same page.

The point, as it affects the beginner, is that a distinct cleavage between opinion articles and non-opinion articles, must be recognized.

The beginner, on the staff, may be allowed to write articles or leaders, adhering to some indicated policy or harmonizing with the general sentiment of the paper, but these are unsigned.

Expressing Opinions.

The beginner, as a free lance, stands little chance, in the larger papers at all events, of being allowed to express opinions at all, on any of those subjects in which public sentiments are strongly divided.

The beginner may think that it is unjust treatment, but the fact remains, that no matter how strongly he may feel, a big circulation paper is entirely indifferent as to his views on Bolshevism, Lord Birkenhead's latest speech, and the future of the Entente. The

editor has his own views upon such themes, and if he must go outside the anonymity of his staff leader writers, will prefer to invite Bernard Shaw, Arnold Bennett, Sir Leo Money, or folk of similar standing, to voice another opinion.

But the same beginner, having saturated himself in knowledge of the banana trade, the coins found in Egyptian tombs, the women's franchise in Bulgaria, or the treatment of cholera in the Carpathians, may find the editor eager to print his statements and quite generous with cheques.

His value to the editor is his value as a sincere hunter for reliable information, as a clever player of the game of sentence making, or as a pleasing exponent of the arts of verbal illustration. For his views and opinions, the editor cares not a row of brass pins, and will not care, until he is able to show, by the work he has done, the fame he has achieved, or the position he holds in the world of literature or public sentiment, that he has a following who will be interested in reading the views he expresses over his own name.

This point is emphasized here, in view of a case that the writer has recently met, in which a quite gifted beginner, capable of excellent work, breaks down in almost all he undertakes, because of a deeply-rooted hatred of a certain politician, and a fondness for pointing a political moral from every incident he treats. The time may come when this writer will be a vital force in public life, and editors can patiently wait till that time arrives. But in the meantime the work he can do for them is undone, and the work he insists on doing is politely returned.

Nearly every would-be writer has his own strong convictions on some subject or other, and part of his zeal for writing is usually a desire to obtain a platform

and a hearing. This is very laudable. Without doubt there are several cases in which a writer has been strong enough to dictate to the press and to insist "If you don't print my opinions you shall not print my work at all." Such a man as G.K.Chesterton is a good illustration, as his opinions constitute an essential part of his work and, probably, did so in the first line he wrote for the press.

But the beginner who takes this line adds a heavy weight to his task, a weight that very few men, starting to earn a living by the pen, can easily carry.

Although this fact is admitted here, and the beginner is advised to be content with anonymity at first, and try to give the editor what is wanted for the good of the paper, the young writer should never lose sight of the "platform" idea. He should endeavour all the time to get his name to the front, and he should be prepared, when he is strong enough to do so, to take some risks in order to become known to the public.

A case that occurred some years ago illustrates the point.

A staff-writer employed by a well-known firm of publishers, wrote several columns for the different publications every week, his name not appearing on any of them. One day he brought an article to the chief editor.

"If this is published," he said, "I would like my name on it."

"But why?" asked the editor.

"It is my special subject," said the young man. "I express opinions here that are my own. Later I intend to write chiefly upon this theme. It is an out-of-the-way subject usually appealing to a certain section of readers only, but also with an occasional topical interest."

The chief editor read the article and consented to the suggestion.

Another case : A young man wrote a book on a subject on which he had inside experience. It was of a somewhat technical character but with a possible general appeal. A publisher to whom he submitted it, invited him to call.

"We like the book," he said, "but to put it quite frankly, your name is unknown to us and might not sell a copy. Now, Sir Robert Blank is a big man in this kind of subject and we know he would not object to put his name to it—maybe, with a few trifling alterations. You understand. You get the cheque, but he appears as the author."

The young man was tempted. He wanted the money badly, and the fear of never placing the work troubled him. Already it had been declined two or three times.

But he held out.

"This is my special subject," he said, "and the book will never be published or it will bear my name."

"Oh, very well," said the publisher with a sigh, "We'll risk it. We decided to take the book in any case."

They might have decided against such an action. They might have given him a choice "£20 with your name as author or £100 with Sir Robert's." He boldly took his fate in his hands and the book duly appeared, doing a great deal towards making him a recognized authority upon his theme and thus giving him an easier way of entry into papers and among publishers who were interested.

The point here is that the young author should aim at getting his name before the public, but not be disappointed if he does not succeed in doing so at once. The curse of journalism in this country is anonymity, and it would be a good thing for the profession, if

the French custom of signatures to everything were observed.

The writer of fiction has a better chance in this respect than the writer of other kinds of prose. Stories are expected to bear the name of an author, and with few exceptions it is not very difficult to have the name added.

But even in story publication, this is not always the case. In one well-known group of story papers the contributors must not use their own names but must write under a *nom de plume* that belongs to the firm. In another case the author is allowed to write under his own name if he wishes, but in this case it is on the clear understanding that he must not use that name in similar papers of other firms.

Article Writing.

There is no fixed rule as to the way in which a writer of articles goes to work. An idea may present itself in conversation or reading ; the subject may be the topic of the newspapers, or it may relate to a little considered but interesting subject. Throughout this book emphasis is laid on the importance of writing on subjects present in the public mind, but the quite ordinary everyday article or incident is also a good theme. Your hammer, your umbrella, your Persian cat, and the snowball that has just removed your hat in the street are all fit for treatment.

Here is a suggested order that may be useful—

1. Choose your subject.
2. Select the paper to which you intend to submit the article.
3. If it is convenient and easy, discuss the subject with the editor and either get him to commission it, or to indicate a willingness to give it favourable consideration. For this work a telephone is useful.

4. Decide upon the length.

5. If the article is to be 1,000 words or under, divide your points into three or four groups. A full synopsis is scarcely necessary in order to commence writing, but a rough division of this kind is helpful.

6. Omit any introduction, and omit any explanation of why you decided to write the article. Let your first half-dozen words take the reader right into the theme. If, for instance, you are writing upon paper currency, it is better to commence "French francs, quoted to-day at 81.55, have fallen . . ." than to commence "A very interesting point to all thoughtful people is raised . . ."

7. Aim at clearness first, foremost, and all the time. Sacrifice anything and everything to this. You have hours in which to write the paragraphs that your public will read in minutes. But remember also, that if there are a million readers and you save ten minutes by making each reader lose one minute, your ten minutes will cost the readers an aggregate of over one year and three-quarters of time.

Clear writing is *not* easy. Clearness and simplicity are usually the result of hard work on the writer's part. When a man writes matter that makes everyone say, "Apparently you can just reel it off," the truth is nearly always the exact reverse. Easy reading is evidence of hard writing, and vice versa.

8. Illustrate your points where space permits or where a doubtful point can be made clearer in this way. It is sometimes better to run the risk of writing down to the lowest intelligence among the readers, than to leave an important point open to doubt by all but the best informed.

9. Use honest English words, and short ones for preference. When you are practised in writing you can occasionally use a foreign phrase or a series of long words

when a particular effect (such as a humorous effect) is desired. It is wise for the beginner to save up foreign phrases and latinized polysyllabic sesquipedalianisms for a special article of their own; at all events they should be kept out of the work intended for sale.

10. Open your article abruptly and close it with sharpness. Shut down on your strongest point. A peroration in a spoken address can last for five minutes. In a written article try and make it five words—or, as a wise alternative, omit it altogether.

Throughout this chapter, the class of writings usually spoken of as articles has been chiefly discussed. These are the contributions that appear in the magazine sections of newspapers, in quarterly and monthly reviews and magazines, and in papers of such widely varied types as *The British Weekly*, *Answers*, *The Grocer's Gazette*, and *Business Organisation and Management*.

But there are many other forms of contributions well worth the beginner's attention. Some of these are indicated below.

Leaders.

The leaders of the daily and weekly newspapers are usually written by members of the staff, or specialists who are journalists and authors of wide experience. A daily paper may have outside leader writers, but usually the way on to this list is either through the staff entrance or through attaining reputation in special subjects.

Leader Paragraphs.

There is more opening for the beginner who is able to realize the outlook of a particular paper, in writing leader paragraphs than leaders.

These are much more common than they were at one time. There have come into existence a number of

weekly journals of which *John Bull* may be taken as an advanced type. A glance at the first few pages of this paper will explain what is meant. These pages are filled with paragraphs varying in length from a line or two to a couple or three inches.

Such paragraphs are common in many papers. They were the chief fare at one time of literary periodicals, but *Truth* at first, and latterly, cheaper papers, have popularized them.

Mostly they are written by staff writers, but editors are always open-minded, and the beginner who can graduate in this class of work has a warm place in their hearts.

These paragraphs are not easy to write. They must be consistent with the paper's policy. They must present a clear, sharply defined picture, and the comment must be crisp and sparkling. Some writers possess a natural aptitude for this sort of thing. Some can get a whole volume of meaning into a comment that may consist of only a single word.

Beginners should try their hands at it.

Chatty News Paragraphs.

Many papers run a column or so of notes, often apparently the work of one man, but also, at times, the work of several writers combined over a fictitious signature or *nom de plume*. It would not be courteous here to indicate examples, and give away trade secrets by naming any special paper, but a glance through almost any newspaper will show what is meant.

The interesting and "meaty" paragraph of about 100 words is greatly in request just now. From the outsider's point of view, two important facts must be borne in mind: (1) the paragraph must be in agreement with the methods and policy of the paper; and (2) the market

may need to be searched in order to find those papers that accept such contributions from outsiders.

Reviews of Books.

This work is not easy to obtain unless one lives in London and is in touch with the editor or staff. The best way of entry is usually to be a specialist in some subject and, consequently, the beginner is barred through lack of qualifications. However, a writer of little practice in authorship might qualify by other experience: as for example, one who has lived for years in the Balkans might be able to get permission to review books on these countries.

Reviews, in average, are not well paid.

Dramatic Reviews.

The editor of a little known and rather unsuccessful paper once declared that, on the average, ten to twenty journalists a week offered to write theatrical reviews for his paper. Many of them were willing to do this without payment. There are many people who would like to have free seats in all the theatres and music-halls in London. There is no need for other comment.

Verses.

Poetry is not played out. There is a constant and increasing demand for the lyric: the short poem of twelve to twenty lines. But this kind of work is not well paid, and should be regarded more as a pleasing variation of work than as a serious means of earning money.

Humorous Comment Pars.

There is always a demand for short humorous paragraphs, but the papers that print these usually leave the whole column they devote to it, to one contributor.

The man with a gift of humour and the necessary terse style should not neglect the occasional chances of doing work of this kind.

Humorous Articles.

Editors regard humour as a devastating thing unless well under control, and they rarely entrust much work to an unproved humorist. There is a real reason for this: humour, when too widely sprinkled through a journal that professes to be serious in intention, creates an atmosphere of flippancy and insincerity. *Punch*, the most successful humorous paper of our times, affects, obviously with intention, a stodgy dullness in some of its features. *Punch* is a masterpiece of editing, not because it is a rollicking scream from cover to cover, but because it grimly preserves the dignity of a national institution simultaneously with being a great laugh-maker.

The ordinary editor cannot even take the risks that *Punch* must take. He obtains hard cash for printer's ink. He must shape up that ink in some form of substance. Hence, he is suspicious of any dealer in jocularities who has not at least the dignity of a judge.

Jokes.

Some beginners contribute jokes of the smart repartee kind. As a rule this work is wasted, for nearly all editors have sources from which they can obtain a more than sufficient supply. A really new jest, however, is welcomed by such papers as *Punch*.

Ideas for Artists.

Some jests that lend themselves to illustration in a new and striking way are quite worth sending to likely papers, as suggestions for the artist.

Ideas for Articles.

It may surprise many readers to know that there is at least one journalist making a good weekly income by submitting ideas to editors. He himself is an ex-editor and can tell almost instinctively the kind of matter that will suit any selected paper.

Each idea, marked boldly " Idea " at the top, is stated in as few words as make the meaning clear, and perhaps a dozen of these may be submitted at a time. As he is not himself a writer, and as many of his suggestions involve interviews and research, he simply supplies and sells the ideas.

Every day he arms himself with newspapers and keeps himself conversant with affairs. He is very careful to avoid obvious subjects.

In this work it is necessary to make some arrangement beforehand, and also, to be sure that the editors supplied will treat the suggestions in fairness and good faith. Beyond this the contributor, while cautious, must not be suspicious, or too easily inclined to think that his idea has been stolen, merely because the editor or some other contributor has thought of the same subject.

Personal Interviews with Editors.

There are some outside contributors who can get right through to the editor or his chief sub. They are welcome because they come to help him. These are the trusted men and women who supply him with the matter he wants.

Notice some Facts.

They *bring* ideas. After a word of greeting and without waste of time, out comes the list. Let us take such a visit—

" An interview with Florence Troon," says the contributor.

"Who's she?" from the editor.

"Canadian suffragette. Just arrived in London. Was once nearly tarred and feathered."

"No good. Suffragettes played out at the moment."

"Suggestion No. 2: An old golden mug has been found at Peterborough in the false roof of an inn. Suggested article: 'Secrets of old Inns.'"

"Stodgy title, but subject good. Can you get matter?"

"I think so."

"Do it. Seven-fifty words. Next."

"Professor Burlface is staying at the Ritz."

"Hope they'll treat him to their best. Who is the gentleman?"

"American professor. Inherited a million dollars three years ago. Built and endowed a cancer research laboratory. Subjects suggested: 'Can cancer be cured?' or 'The need for more science laboratories.'"

"Too vague. See if you can get him on to explanations of the way an analyst does his work; get a few pictures of his appliances and clear explanations as to how they are used. Get him to sign the article. Give an inch at the top to the million he inherited and why."

And so the list proceeds.

There is no waste of time. When business is done the man sets off, and the editor turns to the work he has to do.

This man selects articles and plans his campaign before he sees the editor, but his work is not limited to his own suggestions, for he is precisely the kind of person to whom the editor gives ideas.

"Look here, Simpson. Do you know anything about railway arches? Of course you do. Well, I've had about twenty photographs of queer railway bridges sent in, and they want stringing together with a connected

article. I'm having them all re-drawn, of course. Can you do it by Thursday ? ”

And here is a point worth noting. If you mean to make a living by the pen try to see the editors or, at all events, their “subs.” An interview with an editor should be prepared for. Naturally it is “up to” the caller to say what he wants, and he should be armed with rather more ammunition than a vague “I wish to write for you.”

Before you see an editor, study his paper. Try to regard it as a carefully planned whole and not as a haphazard collection of accidents flung together by a perfunctory time-server who happened to have nothing else to put in.

Be ready with a few suggestions, but do not be so eager about them that you do not give the poor man a chance to say what he wants to say. If you have done previous literary or journalistic work, tell him. But make it compressed.

Pick out anything outstanding and striking you have done of which a beginner might be proud, such as “I had an article in *The Daily Mail*,” or “I had a story in last month's *Novel Magazine*.” This helps him to place you.

Make your suggestions compactly. Have them ready on paper. Do not waste his time, but let yours be at his service. Editors often like a chat with an ambitious beginner.

CHAPTER IX

INTERVIEWING

A GOOD interviewer need scarcely trouble whether he is on the staff or a free-lance. There are advantages in both conditions. To the beginner a staff appointment is usually a great help and encouragement, but, where there is exceptional ability, an interviewer can usually earn a larger income by retaining his liberty.

Interviewing makes a demand on other qualities besides ability to write. Many a good writer would fail hopelessly in this work unless he had other qualities besides the power to wield a fountain pen.

The successful interviewer is usually an all-round man, fairly well read, able to get on with other people, tactful, discriminating, and full of simple, shrewd sense. He should have plenty of patience and be able to put in a bit of really hard work not only "when he feels like it," but at the pressing hour, day or night, when nothing but downright, energetic toil will meet the case.

The work, in total, is not hard. The life has many changes, some pleasant and some irksome, and there are privileges. The temptations to "do nothing much in particular" and do it all the time, are many. The interviewer will probably find that keeping himself up to working pitch is the hardest part of his task.

Being on the staff as an interviewer, has the advantage that the beginner is rarely expected to supply all the ideas. In all probability he is kept quite busy carrying out instructions given to him.

Then again, as a member of the staff, there is the advantage of authority. He has been "sent by the

editor," he "represents the paper." This is a very important advantage that the free-lance interviewer should also endeavour to obtain.

A member of the staff is not dependent upon the speedy publication of his articles in order to obtain payment, nor need his work be necessarily profitable at a calculation of so much per thousand words published. It may suit the editor to allow him to spend time in obtaining information that may never be used.

An interviewer on the staff does not pay his own expenses. A free-lance worker in London can scarcely take the risk of a flying trip to Liverpool to head off an important visitor. But if the paper wants that man met, a few pounds up or down do not matter. A free-lance cannot go far afield, a staff writer may be in the Isle of Man on Monday, the Isle of Wight on Tuesday, and, may spend the rest of the week in the Orkneys.

A staff appointment is not easy to obtain. These positions are usually filled by selections from those who have qualified in good free-lance work.

Hence, in this book, the presumption is made that advice on this subject is chiefly for those who desire to get into journalism in this way.

Here are a few important points:

Selecting the Person.

The persons who are interviewed are—

1. The man or woman of the hour, such as the scientist who has just made a great discovery ; the author of the new book that is booming ; the man who startles us with a new theory, such as "Dancing cures corns " or "Stick your chest out, breathe deeply, and you will make a million " ; or the man who can extract silver from coke.

2. The person who is an authority upon an uppermost

subject. Thus, if a scientist suggests that the creation of electricity robs the atmosphere of an already limited and necessary gas, an interview with any great electrician would be topical. Equally, should a railway company decide to abandon "classes" in its rolling stock, an interview with a leading railway authority might be valued by an editor.

3. The man or woman who heads an activity that is quite interesting and ordinary, and that we all take for granted, but do not specially notice. Such subjects as "adult schools," "running a motor-bus service," "prison-gate missions," "police control of bus traffic," even when not topical, furnish excellent reading matter.

Selecting the Paper.

When the person and theme have been selected the approval of a suitable editor should be obtained. Some writers do not proceed in this way. They obtain the interview first and then endeavour to sell it. There are two objections to this course: (1) The interviewer must make the approach on his own responsibility; and (2) the person interviewed may be offended if the article does not appear.

When an editor assents to an interview being obtained, the contributor can then use the name of the paper, and so be armed with authority that should help him.

Getting to see the Person.

A good presence, ready tact, and a quick mind greatly assist the interviewer. As a rule the direct attack is the best. Do not trouble about preliminary letters, but go to the place where your man can be seen. If he is a Member of Parliament the lobby of the House is a good place. If he is an actor you may find him at the theatre.

The telephone is useful for obtaining appointments, but there are cases where this may forewarn a man and give him time to say "No!"

Those who earn a living by getting into the limelight are usually very easy to approach. Public entertainers, certain politicians, and many business men are intensely cordial when being interviewed. Others, on the other hand, like leading doctors, are bound to reticence by the etiquette of their professions, and are reluctant to let their names appear in print.

The Bodyguard.

Nearly always the really prominent person has a secretary or a faithful henchman who constitutes a barrier between him and the press. This kind of bodyguard has rarely the understanding of values that his employer possesses. He will be assuring an interviewer in the outer office that "Sir George is far too important to be troubled about such a matter," while Sir George in the inner office is wearing his heart out because no editor has the gumption to send along someone to obtain his opinion.

The bodyguard of the well-known man is the most unreliable adviser an interviewer can meet. He knows his master's mind, but in publicity subjects he is pretty sure to know it all wrong.

As an example of what an interviewer may meet, consider the following—

A journalist called on the managing director of a great manufacturing firm which had built its huge business by advertisement. The paper wanted the opinion of a leading man in that trade on a subject of topical interest. The caller saw the director's private secretary.

"We wouldn't dream of it," said the official. "We have had far too much of that sort of thing lately."

"Yet you like publicity. You buy a good many half-pages and spend a lot of money on posters."

"Which to my mind is a mistake," said the secretary. "Our goods are sufficiently well known. But this is a different matter. We won't be interviewed."

The journalist, new at the work, took this as a final answer and had an interview with the head of a lesser known house. Almost at once a rival paper came out with a lengthy and interesting article upon the whole subject over the signature of the man whose opinion had first been sought.

In this case, while the private secretary was laying down the law, his employer was actually working hard at an article on the subject, as it vitally concerned his business and had become suddenly topical. Had the interviewer only got through, he could have secured more than he had hoped for. As it was, the managing director, blissfully unaware that a representative of his favourite paper had been warned off by the faithful secretary, was himself obliged to seek an editor.

This point is dealt with at length, because the interviewer who fails to see his man, fails in the chief part of his work.

Signed Articles.

The word "interview" is used. Nowadays the actual interview form of writing is not very popular with editors. In consequence the caller has the much more difficult task of obtaining permission for the article to appear over the name of the prominent person. Sometimes his signature is desired for reproduction.

In most of these cases the article is written for the man, and this may mean two interviews or more.

It follows that the journalist must be fairly proficient in writing, or at all events be able to write some form

of English that a public man would not object to "father."

However well a man writes, he will come to grief some time or other on this point. There are some pedants who would quarrel with the literary style of a grammarian or cavil at the grammar of a poet.

An interviewer, a little while ago, when packed off to Oxford in a great hurry to get the opinion of some authority there, had a devastating experience. He obtained the views and ideas that were desired, embodied them into an article at his hotel, and hurried back by appointment to obtain the great man's signature.

The manuscript was read in a silence which became slowly appalling, and at last the man of learning spoke.

He commenced by calling attention to the split infinitive which opened the ball, worked slowly on, and, as he read and commented, the vials of his wrath burst and he became nearly speechless.

"What? Sign that abomination? I should be the laughing-stock of Oxford."

Yet the editor, in this case, when appealed to, said the article was "quite good," which is high praise from an editor.

Treating an Interviewee as a Gold Mine.

An alert interviewer, who is a free-lance, sometimes comes upon a public man or woman who likes publicity and who may have useful ideas of his own.

Thus: A prominent actress is interviewed on the pressing subject of "Actresses on Tour." She supplies the matter, and the article is placed in *Kitchen's Weekly*. She also talks about her new stage dress in the play, *Tommy's Secret*.

"Ah!" says the interviewer, "I think *The Flappers*'

Fashion Notes might like an article on 'My Stage Dresses.' "

It does. Then "The Actor who Irritates Me" is written and appears in one paper, to be followed in another by "Some Managers I have Known," and a constant stream of other articles.

Presently the interviewer gets a sort of proprietary right in her opinions. He can bargain with editors for contributions over her name. He does the work and gets the money. She obtains the help of useful publicity.

Another interviewer may have a great merchant or manufacturer behind him in the same way.

There are able journalists who work the House of Commons lobby, and though many journalists are now M.P.s, this is still a good fountain-head for copy.

Articles that are "Fathered."

A variation of the method should be noted.

There are some journalists who get to know a number of prominent people who have no objection to "fathering" a good article.

The journalist works in the ordinary way. He writes an article on a suitable theme, but instead of sending it in unsigned, secures more ready acceptance and a higher rate of payment by inducing some well-known man to sign it as author.

The ethics of this custom are not here discussed : it is only the fact that is stated.

CHAPTER X

HOW TO GET ON THE STAFF

ONE journalist, who afterwards became the editor of an important magazine, got "on the staff" by a bold move.

He advertised that he would work for nothing for six months as reporter, writer, and sub-editor for any paper that would engage him.

One editor said "snap." It was a small provincial paper that accepted this half-year's free labour, but the proprietors afterwards paid him a good salary in order to retain him. Afterwards he transferred to a London publication and climbed to an editorship.

Another journalist got "on the staff" by winning first place in a literary competition. "A staff appointment or £100 cash" was the first prize. He took the appointment and slipped naturally into work for which he had aptitude.

A writer in conversation with the head of a well-known publishing house made an unexpected and rather witty reply to a question. "I want you inside," said the publisher. "Can you start at once?"

These instances, picked at random, show that there is no uniform method. Many people enter journalism as other professions are entered, by passing from school to the newspaper office. The influence of parents or guardians, or even the payment of a premium, may be a means of entrance. This method of entry is still usual in the provinces.

In this book, which views the subject of professional writing from the creative point of view, it is recognized that an entry, in boyhood, by some system like

apprenticeship, though it may help one to become a good editor, is not the best entry to help one to become a good writer.

The youth who sees newspaper production from the inside, can easily become obsessed by the mechanical aspect of the work. Caught in the machine at an early age, forced to deal with other people's views, very likely sent out as reporter, thinking in inches and columns, he can become so useful to any paper that he has never time for those more adventurous exploits with the pen which call out originality.

There is so much really hard work of a routine nature, which demands experience but chills originality, in newspaper land, that the journalist, trained from his youth in the requirements of the press, can easily miss the vision which inspires the ambitious would-be publicist, poet, or novelist all the time.

"Getting on the staff" is here considered as the aid to the original writer—a useful means of bridging the awkward years in which he cannot earn quite sufficient as a free-lance. It is also suggested as a helpful way of gaining an inside knowledge of what the publishing world requires, so that, as a free-lance writer, a little later, he can better supply the demand.

It is suggested that this kind of writer is often all the better for experience in some other place. It is really surprising how varied have been the early occupations of many of the men and women whose writing carries weight in the press. It is probably a good thing for readers that Dickens started life in a blacking factory and not in a newspaper office. It is good that Wells had a practical knowledge of drapery, and that Beresford was an architect.

But a year or two "on the staff" is excellent training.

Here are some ways of getting on the staff or of becoming closely allied with it—

The Outside Staff.

Many papers have a select inner coterie of paid employees who give their whole time services in return for salary. In addition to these there are frequently a few reliable writers and helpers, who work so frequently for them that they constitute a kind of outside staff.

In the chapter on interviewing, something of this sort is indicated. A good interviewer, who finds that one paper or one group of papers can keep him busy, and who receives payment almost every week, by-and-by, through the fact that he makes almost daily calls at the office, gets the freedom of the place much as a regular employee might.

He may get on such terms that he enters the editor's office without being announced, that he steps into the lift without explaining himself to the commissionaire, and that to all intents and purposes he ties himself to one house.

Such a man, already practically on the pay-sheet, might have no difficulty in going a little farther and making a salary arrangement, from which by easy gradations or sudden change, he might at any time find himself sitting at his desk and keeping regular hours.

A case occurred a few years ago.

A contributor to a publishing house who received a regular weekly cheque and "balanced up once a quarter," called on the chief editor according to custom for his weekly chat.

"I'm in a hole," said the editor. "Two of my men on holiday and the other two down with influenza. I hate to wire to those men to come back. Can you give

me a fortnight? I'll edit, and you write the little bits I want, and cut the articles to fit, and we'll do the three papers between us."

"With joy," said the contributor.

At the end of the fortnight the chief editor spoke earnestly to him.

"Will you stay on? One of the subs. has got another place and is leaving me in a fortnight."

This contributor was doing too well to accept. But he stayed on till a new sub-editor was appointed, and occasionally after that "came inside" for an occasional week or two when wanted.

The all-round writer who can turn his hand to anything, or the writer who has a special subject, frequently gets a chance of a part-time appointment on one of those numerous smaller papers devoted to special subjects. These are often controlled by editors who are busy men in other directions and who need someone to put in a day or two a week on the routine work. This is not an ideal way of gaining experience, as the editor may himself be an amateur, but it gives an insight to technical points such as seeing a paper to press.

Editors are always open for new ideas, and, as a rule, they are very fair to the people who bring them.

A young man thought out a new kind of competition, and brought it to the editor.

"What do you want for the idea?" he was asked.

"I want a weekly salary and a position as a judge while it is running. You will have to employ a good many."

"Agreed!" said the editor.

The competition ran several months. At the end another took its place and the young man stayed on. Presently he was given a chance as sub-editor, and soon became a recognized member of the editorial staff.

Another case.

A young man outlined a new paper and brought the plan to a firm. He knew nothing of editing, but the idea was good. His condition was "editorship or I take it elsewhere."

He was appointed editor, with a sub. beneath him and a director above him, to keep him from making mistakes. In three months he was able to do his work with practically no supervision.

While upon this subject it is well to remind the journalist that "getting on the staff" can be dangerous. A man who might be a brilliant author can, by becoming a sub-editor, get into a groove in which he will never make a great mark, and abandon, for the security of a weekly salary, a rather more risky occupation in which he might have greater chances of success.

CHAPTER XI

THE SHORT STORY

ABILITY to write a good short story constitutes one of the best ways into authorship. In consequence the beginner is advised to make a serious endeavour to get before the public in this way.

But the beginner should be very careful to view this occupation with caution. Only a comparatively few are capable of maintaining a sufficiently constant output of works of this kind to secure reasonable payment for the time and ability required.

It is probable that there are very few people who can make a living solely by writing short stories, and, unless these few are able to command prices far above the average rates of pay, their incomes are small.

Many of our most popular authors commenced by writing short stories, but in nearly every case they changed the nature of the work as speedily as they could do so. The reason, to a large extent, is that the really good short story is a study in compression, and, beyond a certain point, a man who compresses his work cuts down his own market price.

H. G. Wells is one of the best short story writers we possess: his collected earlier works, published in the volume *The Country of the Blind*, should be read by every beginner. It is easy after reading this volume to see that Wells could have naturally taken the line that O. Henry and Leonard Merrick took. Some of his earlier novels had just the right plots for 5,000 word *Strand Magazine* stories. *The Time Machine* and *The Invisible Man* are good examples.

But Wells knew when to leave the short story stage. Either of the two books mentioned would help to pass the time on a short railway journey if it were served up as a magazine tale. As a complete novel it gets a better grip on the attention and can be re-read with pleasure. The fact that these two stories were written in book form did more for the author than secure a better publicity, for by their new appeal they introduced him to a different public and laid the foundation of a world-wide success.

In this chapter we have to deal with practical considerations. In plain, blunt English, if H. G. Wells had kept entirely to short stories he would have remained a relatively poor man.

Income Figures.

What is true of writers of his calibre is also true of writers who reach a more limited public. It is possible for a short story writer to make a decent professional income when he is able to command ten guineas a thousand words, and upwards ; but the short story writer who meets with just ordinary success and who takes payment at ordinary rates, is flirting with poverty all the time.

The big man can break away into the novel or important constructive writing. The man of lesser ability should make some similar departure. Short stories, as a rule, are a bridge to carry one over, but it is the kind of bridge that becomes less secure the longer it extends.

" Why don't you send me some of your short stories ? " said an editor to a contributor recently. He followed the query with some very courteous appreciations of past work of this nature.

" The answer is simple," said the contributor. " I rarely get hold of more than one or two good plots in a

week. A three-thousand-word story constitutes, for me, two or three days' work in actual writing and re-writing. It is true that one can do other things at the same time, but from practical experience I have found that the best of one's thought and attention must be put into this kind of work, leaving little mental strength for other labour. You paid me £3 3s. 0d. for each story. Eight short stories a month is hard work the first month and impossible work the third. I am a fortunate man if I place two-thirds of my stories of this kind."

This writer went on to explain that, to test the work as a means of livelihood he once kept to short stories only for nearly six months, and during that time earned on an average just over £4 a week. He was a good writer, but not good enough to command special rates. Very rarely he received two guineas a thousand words : more often he received one guinea.

His ledger account of that six months showed some remarkable facts. The amounts he received in many cases came in months afterwards, and some of the stories visited several publishers before being placed. When a story had been rejected six times he abandoned further attempts or treated the idea in another way.

		Received	£	s.	d.
1st week.	Six stories written.		16	12	0
2nd "	Three " "	"	8	8	0
3rd "	Four " "	"			
	(2 hopeless)	"	4	0	0
4th "	Two " "	"	6	0	0
5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th weeks	Ten " "				
	(4 failures, and 3 sold " cheap ")	"	13	10	0
3rd month.	Eight stories written.	"	24	5	0
4th "	} Many stories written ; } only a few placed.	"	42	0	0
5th "					
6th "					
			<hr/>		
			114	15	0

Some reader will say that £114 for six months' work is not discouraging. It would not be so to a beginner, but this was a writer with some years of experience, who was immediately able to get better payments for other kinds of literary work.

The point that should be particularly noticed was that during the first week he wrote six stories, which were placed immediately and earned nearly sixteen guineas. This was success he could not afterwards obtain for a month's work.

The explanation was, that a writer with fairly prolific ideas can easily think out half-a-dozen good plots, but he cannot keep on doing it.

The incident is narrated without prejudice. It is possible that had he continued writing in this way, he might have forced his rate higher, but he wearied of the task, and took alarm at the increasing ill-success that was coupled with a diminishing output.

The adventure took place before the War. Some papers and magazines now pay a higher rate—on the other hand, some do not. The beginner is likely to hear all kinds of fantastic prices quoted, but in the majority of cases the editor who pays any of these, pays for the contributor's name.

From one guinea to two guineas per thousand words marks the outer prices of most contributions.

At present, however, there is an appreciation of the really good short story that is a pleasing new feature in authorship, and that may have the effect of materially altering the outlook for those who are chiefly attracted to this class of work. In America, a really original story will command a far higher price than was the case a few years ago, and a few publishers in England are following suit.

Whether or not the rate of payment will be permanently raised so as to place this kind of work among the

more secure ways of 'making a living, the fact remains that the short story is the ideal road into authorship for the beginner, but when a man has fallen on his feet he will find it wise not to depend solely on this work.

There is a free field of competition. A few magazines of high standing have only restricted room for the work of the beginner, but otherwise the unknown man stands as good a chance as the person who has contributed for years. The good story is not only welcome but eagerly hunted for, and the name of the author scarcely matters at all. This fact, which tells against the professional writer a little later, is all in favour of the amateur writer at the beginning.

Practical Hints for Short-Story Writing.

Be sure that you have a story to tell.

This advice seems so obvious as to be hardly worth stating. But a little practical experience of editorial work will convince anyone that this advice is highly necessary.

There are three kinds of stories which fail in this respect—

1. The story that is merely a bald narrative of commonplace occurrences, such as could be thus summarized: "Mr. Smith got up in the morning, went to work at the office, and came back in the evening and went to bed. During the day he met Miss Brown, and the rest of the tale is what he said to her and what she said to him, and it is all just nothing."

This kind of story reaches the editors by the gross, and no one knows why it is sent in. The man who writes it apparently does not realize that when practised writers indulge occasionally in commonplace letterpress, they do it as a background to incident, or to indicate character or create atmosphere. A skilled artist in words might

do something with thin happenings of this kind, but he gets life into it when he does. More often he leaves the method alone.

2. The story that is really an anecdote diluted with verbiage. A recipe for this kind of writing is as follows : " Read *Punch* for the week. Pick out a three-line joke. Spread that joke over 3,000 words. Send it to an editor."

It will come back !

If you wish to write a serious story on the same lines, take an inch paragraph from a newspaper instead of a three-line joke from *Punch*. Serve in the same way.

It also will come back.

3. The story that is quite good but so ordinary and obvious that everyone knows the end before the first paragraph is finished. " Jack meets Juliet in a bus. They get to know each other. Jack proposes. He is accepted. They quarrel once or twice. Finally, they marry."

That story also is done to death. It could, of course, be the basis of some really vigorous writing. Every life is a romance, and an ordinary love-story told with sincerity and feeling grips us all.

But, from the point of view of the beginner, an unnecessary strain is accepted in taking such a formless and pointless plot. There is no story in it, and only the writer whose language is a model of gracefulness and power dare adopt the method. Mostly, this kind of writer has the good sense not to !

A very popular orator used to amaze the readers of his reported speeches—they were so hopelessly dull and unilluminating, just strings of bald, hackneyed, commonplace truisms. As soon, however, as the hitherto bewildered critics heard him speak, the mystery was explained, for the orator had a voice of remarkable sweetness that made listening a pleasing experience.

One could never tire of tones which changed the tritest trash into thrilling music.

The beginner should not try to do this sort of thing in story writing. The editor likes the music of language, but he also has a way of asking: "Well, what is it all about?" Also—the beginner may not be able to use words compellingly.

The Plot.

The plot of a short story should centre around one idea. That idea should be simple in its essence, and, when the complete tale has been told, that one simple idea should be the clear-cut impression left on the mind of the reader.

To explain this we will take three fairly well-known stories—

Maupassant's *The Necklace*: A poor young couple are invited to a grand ball. The wife borrows a necklace from a wealthy friend, and during the ball this is stolen. A similar necklace is bought by the young couple in order to replace the loss. They mortgage their whole future to raise the money. Years afterwards, almost in starvation, and his wife at death's door, the husband lets the rich friend hear of the long sacrifice.

"But my necklace was only imitation," says the friend.

Here is the terrible simple idea. Youth, prospects, home, and a lifetime unnecessarily flung away because of false pride. The necklace was worth a few shillings.

Leonard Merrick's *The Call of the Past*: A very prosperous barrister had written a farce in his youth under a *nom de plume*. An actor-manager comes upon it and puts it on the boards, inviting the author to rehearsal at Ashton-under-Lyne to see how it shapes. He is angry at first, but his old Bohemian past calls him,

and he decides to go. Anonymously he slips into his old life for a day or two. The girl playing "leading lady" attracts him—with wedding-bell consequences.

H. G. Wells' *The Truth about Pyecraft*: Pyecraft, abnormally fat ("a great rolling front of chins and abdomina"), obtains an old recipe, "How to reduce weight," and tries it patiently. It acts: it reduces *weight* but not size. In consequence Mr. Pyecraft, fat as ever, floats to the ceiling, and has to wear leaden underclothing before he ventures out of doors."

Now these three baldly outlined stories are quite simple ideas. In each case the writer is not satisfied to tell his tale as a bleak narrative of incident. There is characterization, carefulness and ingenuity in presenting detail, dexterity in working up the climax. But as the narrative proceeds the simple outline becomes not more dim, but more clear.

In the first of them the story closes down on the surprise: the stolen gems were valueless, all the sacrifice had been for nothing.

In the second the opportunity for contrast is seized. The man who may one day become a judge is suddenly attracted by the old delights of acting on tour, with stage lodging-houses and stage-door interests. He becomes a boy again, he awakes to love and finds his mate.

The third is a joke, but it becomes a skilful character-study of a sensitive and rather mean-souled Eurasian whose great grandmother had obtained weird recipes from dubious sources.

The real interest of the story in each case lies largely in the artistic additions. But none of these spoils the shape of the thing. They fall in with the simple plot and emphasize it.

In *The Call of the Past* are many added touches. The

successful barrister, who had been a wandering play-actor till ill-success drove him to his father's lucrative profession and a fortune at the Bar, returning under his stage name to view the old life, catches himself whistling in the street. The sordid lodging-house delights while it repels him. "Ma," herself an ex-"Terpsichorean gymnast," accepts him as one of the art but does it dubiously. The girl is daintily drawn. Later, her ill-luck when she is "resting" constitutes an excuse for an interview at a barrister's law chambers. The lady tries on the barrister's wig, yet in fear lest the great Mr. Blackstone should unexpectedly arrive.

"But, Peggy," said Robert, "*I'm* Blackstone."

So here we see two important facts about the short story—

1. The idea or plot is an essential.

2. The plot is an opportunity for interesting additions.

To use a homely illustration. A simple, bold plot is like a strong clothes-line. It will hold a big "wash": one can hang a lot of things on it.

The Embellishments.

The beginner who has conceived a simple, interesting, and novel idea, naturally asks: "What kind of additions and embellishments shall I add?" We will suppose that his story, as a plain outline, can be told in two hundred words, and as such it would make dull reading. This man wants to present something more lively than a mere synopsis.

In the last two outlines of stories, there are two chief ways indicated. Leonard Merrick would probably better satisfy the strict critic than would H. G. Wells, for, in *The Call of the Past*, all the incidents are closely knit to the story itself. They are all about the stage, or the law, or the appeal of love, or the psychological effect of an

old life suddenly remembered. Every word fits in with an almost mathematical accuracy. Every incident emphasizes the seemingly wide gulf between the irresponsible stage-struck youth and the unnaturally grave and solid lawyer. They illustrate the great discovery that the two are one, and that at the touch of love the real man can emerge from two beings who were both playing a part. This story, because of its psychological truth, might well rank with *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Wells's *The Truth about Pyecraft* is not one of the author's best. It has been chosen because it illustrates another method. The simple joke, that could be told in a few lines, is a "clothes-line" on which hangs some very foreign washing. The joke, once known, is not worth re-reading; but the word-picture of the Eurasian who is supposed to tell the story, is quite good enough to be read a second time or oftener.

This "clothes-line" idea opens up any number of possibilities, and gives the writer with an imaginative mind, a chance of making two appeals in one. It is usual in speaking of short stories to talk about "the setting," indicating the place, time, and circumstances in which the incidents take place. That word "setting" is a real barrier to a number of beginners, as it makes them think too much of a "task" and not enough of an "opportunity."

But the moment you look upon the plot as a clothes-line, you can begin to think of some interesting "washing" to hang on it—and, the "setting" settles itself.

To explain this :

A young writer gets hold of a rather good plot that can be made to apply to any set of circumstances, or would be equally sound in any station in society. It happens that he has just been taking part in a heated election and is

simply bubbling over with interesting facts about committee rooms, blunders of a candidate, anger of an agent over a misprint, and things of that sort. Let him try to write his story, with the scene laid in a West End drawing room (of which he has no knowledge), and the thing becomes chilly. But let him transfer hero, heroine, and the whole contraption to an election committee-room, and he has a dozen ready-made characters to pick and choose from and a score of incidents to change into vehicles of expression. Or :

This same aspirant has recently met a man whose one topic of speech is "glands," a being who talks about "feeding the natural juices of the body" till his friends fly from him. The plot is good but wants a lively character or two introduced into the story to make it read naturally. The writer can make the "gland" maniac one of the characters, with an effect of conviction the story might otherwise lack.

Now, of course, this kind of thing must be done in a workmanlike manner. The story should run along the line of the plot, not be confined to the man interested in glands. This character should come into the story as he comes into the club-room, or as he is met in the street, un-introduced but introducing himself and letting his conversation be such as he usually makes it.

In such a case as this, where a real person is in mind, it might be desirable to change "glands" to "solar plexus" or "diaphragm," which could be done without altering the effect.

Many beginners give themselves unnecessary work, by trying to locate a story amid scenes with which they are not familiar. This is a double disadvantage, because not only is there a risk of error and unreality, but the very element that readers might be interested in, is cut out of the story.

Thus : we will presume that a young author resides in a country town in which all his associates and relations are involved in the ordinary small business of the place. He himself lives above a baker's shop, and he knows all about the mysteries of bread and fancy cakes manufacture and distribution. He knows the social interests of the well-to-do smaller shopkeepers, the complexities and simplicities of the lives that they lead.

This young man, in writing a story, may be tempted to introduce us to the Hon. Robert Sinclair and Sir Hereward Howard's daughter, Clarice. He may fix the proposal in Mayfair, the quarrel at Cowes, and the wedding at St. George's, Hanover Square, places of which he has heard but never seen.

But why ?

The people he knows well would be much more interesting, and he would be able to present them in a more convincing manner. It may be pleasant to read about baronets' daughters, when baronets write about them ; but there are a good many readers who would be quite as interested in a love story centring round a baker's shop.

One of the most pathetic features of successful authorship is the ease with which a well-known writer can drop the ordinary crowd and draw his men and women from a restricted and (apparently) narrow-grooved few. The author is not entirely blameworthy for this. The fact that the writer was happiest when treating of the people he actually met in his humble beginnings, may make him wish to be equally faithful to life when he becomes successful. The author who is talked about *does* meet titled people in plenty ; he is "dined and wined" as often as he will in Mayfair. So what wonder Jack Diver, the carter, and Millie Daw, the mill girl, drop out or are viewed from aloft (as we view beetles in the garden)

when Lady Birkeet and the dashing young Viscount Poleman drop in.

The beginner has rarely the personal difficulty that success in literature brings. He can feel the atmosphere of his own life all around him. He can be true to that life whether it is a Mayfair mansion or a Manchester mill. He need not feel "I meet only M.P.s and aristocrats nowadays, and I have half forgotten what it was like behind the counter." He can let the background be one of personal knowledge.

There are foreign workers in London who never learnt to speak English properly and who have forgotten their native languages. There are authors who are something like them: they have forgotten the real life of youth and now see only the artificial life of society.

So: take the hint. When you have fixed that clothes-line of plot, string upon it the things you really know, the characters you meet, the interests that belong to your own experience.

There was a time when the beginner's hands were rather tied in this matter. Many editors appeared to think that anything less than a baronet was not worth chronicling. There could be tradespeople and servants, of course, just as there could be various curiosities about the house, but they had to be spoken of with affected ignorance.

We are here speaking of much of the kind of writing that was then open to the beginner. There have always been exceptions, of course.

And just as at that time a great many stories had an atmosphere of luxury and wealth, the tendency to-day among many is to pick out an equally strange atmosphere in another direction. There are many writers who have never been inside a Lancashire mill, who try to write mill-girl stories simply because they are popular.

When a man gets on a little way, he may have to do this sort of thing in long complete stories and serials, to suit certain markets. But, for the short story, it is quite unnecessary and highly foolish to go to strange places for what can be found at home.

The Opening Sentences.

There are two important parts of a short story to which special attention should be paid. These are the opening and the conclusion.

The curtain should rise abruptly on a scene in action. "The beginning should be at the middle," as one editor gaily put it. The first sentence should bring the reader right into the story.

Examine these openings—

1. "Stationmaster and engine-driver complained fiercely, yet the police slowly searched a second time, though the train was very late.

"There's a man under the seat here," cried a porter excitedly.

"There was a rush, a sound of scuffling, and the crashing of glass . . ."

.

2. "As the summer sun slowly set over the winding banks of the Tavy, a young woman rose from her garden seat, gathered up her knitting, and sighed."

.

3. "It seemed too good to be true. Yet there was the telegram: he was chosen Town Clerk of Upmill, and the long fight with poverty was over. Flushed with success he darted off to tell Mavis Fellowes of his triumph.

But at St. Luke's church he was delayed a moment, for a wedding party was entering and the bride, on her father's arm, was passing from a closed car to the porch.

Checking his impatience he looked up and saw that the bride was Mavis."

4. " In a side street in Peckham there lived a family of middle-class people called Dennyson, the youngest of whom at the time our story opens was a girl called Dorothy. She was nineteen years of age and earned her living by going as typist in the city.

" Her brother, just a year older than she, was a costing clerk in the city, and these two were inseparable till there came the incidents which we narrate. As usual, it was interest in a third person which caused the separation between these two.

" It came about in this way: Roderick Freeman, who had met Dorothy in the office where she worked, though he had now gained a better situation . . . "

5. " David Hurlingham, a forger at 23, and a ticket-of-leave man at 26, walked into the great offices of Pyke & Hurlingham, and boldly sent in his name to his uncle Robert."

6. " ' The great mistake about this office,' said John Bramble, ' is there is no backway out. One can't run a financial business on a single entrance. It's all right when things are right, but when things go 'scat' people sit and wait for one at the door, and blacken one's eye or weep all over one's bosom. Never again! My next office shall have two doors.' "

Most of these openings are rather melodramatic, but they illustrate the point. The first, third, and fifth get right into the story at once. The second is very faulty; the fourth is hopeless; the sixth, though belonging to a

different type of story, is the best of them all, as the sentence reveals the man and the business, and can be a part of an actual scene.

It is often very difficult for the beginner (or anyone else) to sit down and write the opening sentence of a story before he has written any other part of it. Usually, it pays to write a temporary beginning and then come back and re-write it in final form.

Another good plan is to write the first part of the story, and when a thousand words or so are written, to try the effect of beginning to read the story at the third or fourth paragraph.

In many cases it will be found that the omitted passages are not really required at all, excepting perhaps for the names of the characters. The alteration of a few pronouns into names, supplies all that is wanted, and the sharp effect of an abrupt start is obtained.

The Ending.

A story should close down sharply when the climax is finished. There is only one safe departure from this rule, and that is where the story is lengthened a little beyond this point to achieve an anti-climax.

One form of ending is always a favourite with the reader, and that is the surprise ending.

A good example of this occurs in Maupassant's *The Necklace*. Another is *The Tragedy of a Comic Song*, by Leonard Merrick. At a restaurant a stranger tells the story of a singer. She was a poor girl, but a young poet and a young musician wrote and composed work to suit her on the stage, and she became famous. They both loved her and she could not choose between them, yet they toiled generously in her service. When fame came to her she accepted neither, for there came a "noodle-rich," what you call a "Johnnie in the stalls,"

and she married him. This was the story of the tragedy that the stranger told. It was a simple story, but the man was overcome and broke down as he told it.

"Forgive me," said one who had heard him and followed him into the street, "this is a tragedy of your own life. Which were you—the artist or the poet?"

"I was the 'Johnnie in the stalls,'" he groaned.

"When I tell a funny story on the platform," said a political orator, "I always take care to let the point of the joke come out in the last sentence—in the last word, if I can."

In a certain sense the same rule should be applied to the short story. Something really important should come out in the last few words. The beginner would do well to get a few volumes of the writings of W. W. Jacobs and O. Henry, and specially study the treatment of the closing sentences of these two writers.

CHAPTER XII

LONG COMPLETE STORIES AND LINKED SERIES

It is desirable for the beginner to draw distinctions between different groups of stories. There are four main groups—

1. The short story.
2. The long complete.
3. The serial.
4. The novel.

The short story is a narrative of about three to five thousand words, but sometimes it may be only a few hundred words in length or may contain as many as seven or eight thousand.

A story longer than, say, eight thousand words comes into a different category and is editorially described as a "long complete."

The "long complete" is dealt with in a separate chapter, because the customs of editorial offices become changed in dealing with this longer work.

There are many periodicals which consist almost entirely of one story, or in which a very large proportion of the pages may be taken up by one or two contributions. These varying in length from, say, seven thousand to thirty thousand words, according to the paper, obviously require plan and arrangement in order to secure similarity of length, matter, and treatment.

So one distinction between "long completes" and "short stories" can be drawn. It is not an absolute rule, but it applies in most cases.

The short story market is an open field in which all comers are treated alike and the amateur rubs shoulders

with the well-known novelist, while the "long complete" market is mostly supplied by professional writers who are in close personal touch with the editors.

The short story stands or falls on its own merits as a finished piece of work. The long complete story is rarely written on the off-chance of acceptance. In many cases it is "commissioned" or ordered beforehand; in others the author may be required to take some personal risk (by no means as great as the risk of rejection he takes in writing a short story), but though acceptance is not actually guaranteed, it is almost certain that the story will be taken once the synopsis is passed.

The Procedure.

The usual method of procedure is as follows—

The author should make a careful study of the paper for which he decides to write. In doing this he should pay very serious attention to the plan and policy of the paper, and form a quite clear idea of the kind of people who read it. This really requires a little thought-reading, for he should be able to read the editor's thoughts as evidenced by his work.

The author writes an opening chapter or two—about three thousand words are sufficient for a story of fifteen to twenty thousand. In addition to this he writes a brief synopsis of the plot and purposed continuation.

On this opening the editor gives his decision. He may say "No good" or "Go ahead," or he may point out places where the plot should be strengthened and ask to see a revised synopsis.

Nearly always this branch of work requires personal interviews between author and editor. But the rule is not absolute. One very popular writer of "long completes" lives in the north of England and rarely comes to London. All his synopses are approved or altered or

rejected by post. But this is a man who is rather eagerly courted, and editors will take trouble to secure his stories.

The beginner at this kind of work will be greatly handicapped if he cannot have his weekly "day at the offices."

This "day at the offices" is one of the interesting features of some authors' connection with large publishing firms. There are men and women who write for only one house, and "my day at the offices" means possibly a number of calls in the same building, and it may be lunch with some chum among the editors.

When a writer has been an approved contributor for years, he would not be expected to do more than indicate his proposals in a very brief synopsis; the introductory chapter or two would not be asked for.

Such a writer, in his call on the editor, would bring outlined synopses and explain them. The editor would express his opinions and suggest improvements, and probably the whole plan of a story would be fixed up there and then.

And here an explanation should be made of editorial alterations. The editor often desires to alter the plot of even a champion writer, but he rarely does so because the plot isn't good enough. More often he wants the change made because the original plan clashes with something already done or in preparation. An editor may object to a thrilling story about a train dashing over a burning viaduct—not because he dislikes the idea, but because "Smith has just completed a story with that incident, and the viaduct will be our cover picture." The author's proposal of an accidental meeting between a mill-girl and a sheik on a blue lagoon may be turned down because, however original the

combination, the readers are complaining that sheiks are growing too numerous, and lagoons too blue.

As already explained, some editors will not commission a story even from a trusted and reliable contributor; and though practically all the stories assented to are accepted, the right of rejection is retained. Some editors who are most generous in their acts in this way, are most insistent upon the fact that they "invite the author to submit the finished narrative," but they "do not commission it."

Payment.

To a great extent this subject is wrapped up in the larger subject of scales of payment. Where the price is very low the writer should insist on a definite order.

Prices are tending downwards at present. They did not rise greatly in this class of work during the War, and the probability is that the best firms will soon be paying their pre-war rates. Some are already doing so. The cheaper houses may have a difficulty in getting down to their old level.

To assist the beginner to understand what those rates were, and how they affect the arrangement with the editors, the statement of an author of "long completes" is illuminating.

Before 1914, this author found that—

1. One firm of publishers paid 5s. per thousand words, and gave a hard and fast order when requested. They required no synopsis or first instalment, but the editor discussed the idea of the story with the author.

2. Two or three publishers paid about 7s. 6d., and gave a definite order for the story.

3. Others paid 10s. 6d., but demurred at giving a definite order. In certain cases they would give it if insisted upon, or agree to a "half-rate" for rejections.

4. The best firms paid about a guinea, but retained the right to reject—a right that was only rarely exercised, and even then the author was treated with consideration. In one case he was paid half-rates; in another, he re-wrote half the story.

It will be seen by this list that the best policy is to let the price settle the terms. At the cheaper rates, it would be an act of folly to do the work without a definite order. At the high rates, reasonable risk must be taken.

It is not always easy to get a signed commission, though sometimes a letter from the editor may be read as such.

The writer who intends to make his living by the pen, is advised, however, not to stand on his rights, whether legal or moral, too rigidly. An editor is often a quiet person, who hates "a scene"; and if he hears that Mr. Blake, an author of "long completes," got his cheque from a firm by threatening law, he may say to his sub., "Dear me, dear me, we don't want a fuss like that here. I've got a synopsis of his that might do on a push, but we had better send it back."

Have a clear understanding by all means, but as a rule it is sound policy to let it go at that.

CHAPTER XIII

SERIAL STORIES

It is a singular fact that a serial story which will attract tens of thousands of new readers to a magazine or newspaper, usually fails miserably as a book.

This strange consequence should be noted carefully by the new writer, as it brings home more forcibly than any editorial statement can do, a realization that the serial does really need treatment special to itself.

A few of our leading novelists have succeeded in writing novels that serialized remarkably well. To take three instances : Hall Caine's *The Christian*, Arnold Bennett's *Mr. Prohack*, and H. G. Wells's *Mr. Britling Sees it Through*, all achieved considerable success as serials ; but even in these cases, the papers that published them appealed rather to the restricted magazine class, than to the greater multitude who read cheaper papers.

The serial story that chiefly attracts the attention of the beginner, is the story which in popular papers does really affect the circulation. It is an open secret that the sale of such periodicals as *Answers* can be materially affected, almost from week to week, by the pulling power of the continuous story ; while some of the million circulation newspapers rely more upon this feature than any other, for the increase and maintenance of sales.

The basis of the orthodox serial is melodrama. Every now and again editors weary of this method, or decide that the time has come for a departure of some kind or other. Waves of fashion in reading, and popular interest in new themes, dictate a courageous change ; but in a

brief month or two the pendulum swings back, and melodrama once more reigns supreme.

Throughout their history two papers have been noted for the success (from a popular point of view) of their serials. These are *The Daily Mail* and *Answers*. The credit is probably due to the late Lord Northcliffe, whose understanding of the influence of a serial on circulation was one of his most remarkable editorial abilities.

The tradition of the publishing firms which he founded, still exalts the serial story to a very high place. The good serial writer is a welcome guest at Carmelite House or The Fleetway House.

The beginner who intends to write serial stories should keep these two papers in mind, as their stories constitute the best instruction in what might be called "the framework of the serial." They show, best of all, the artifices and contrivances by which the popular mind can be reached, and its interest, kept alive.

The stories these papers publish would not, of course, be patterns of the kind of stories that all papers require. Plot and subject must be fitted to the special audience, and choice of language, be graded, according to the intelligence of the readers ; but, apart from these, there are some definite characteristics which belong to all works of this class, and these are as well indicated in the two papers named as anywhere.

No definition or description of these necessary features can be adequate. There is only one way in which the student can learn : he must read the serials for himself. It is not necessary to do this laboriously and completely ; perhaps the best lessons of all are the opening instalments of new stories in a few selected papers.

The Curtain.

When such an instalment has been read, the reader's

attention will almost certainly be drawn to the last sentence or two, and he will notice that the intention of these is to make him eager to read what shall follow. The "curtain" is one of the important features, and no one can hope to succeed in this kind of work who fails to stimulate interest and curiosity in what is coming, to such an extent as will make readers desire to buy the next number.

The successful close of an instalment does really induce many people to look for the continuation. The serial reader is probably a type to himself (or more often to "herself"), and it may perplex a writer why, in a world full of quick movement, there should be such large numbers of people who apparently enjoy being kept in suspense from day to day, or week to week, over an incident in the unfolding of a plot.

The editor, however, knows there is this class and knows that it is a huge class. His ability for dealing with this kind of work is largely wrapped up in his knowledge of what constitutes a good curtain.

At one time the editor held that a curtain could be successfully rung down on a startling occurrence, and this method is still popular. At all events a startling occurrence can be an added emphasis to a situation which has other currents of interest.

Take an extremely dramatic case of the modern Lyceum kind.

"As the old church clock across the road slowly struck the hour of midnight, Doris stepped stealthily from her hiding-place behind the piles of deed boxes, and crossed to the door of the strong-room. She was determined at any cost to obtain the letters.

"Remembering the combination, it took her only a moment to get that huge door unlocked. To her surprise it opened much more easily than she had expected.

“ ‘Thank you, Miss Ewart,’ said a man who stepped out of the aperture, ‘I felt sure someone would let me out.’

“It was Felix Waygood, courteous and inscrutable as ever.”

Here is melodrama in its aggressively dramatic manner, containing that quality of surprise that fascinates one type of reader. In the early days of the popular serial this sort of situation would make the editor desire to embrace the author.

But it is doubtful if this style of writing would be quite as welcome to-day, because there is a growing belief that the kind of curiosity which makes readers look for the next number, has very little to do with incident and has very much to do with character.

The startling situation is still useful and will always be popular, but it is really only valuable as part of a psychological effect. What occurs is immaterial—the effect of the occurrence upon the characters is vital.

Nowadays we are accustomed to think of a distinct class of stories as psychological novels, and these, in style and method, are far different from the ordinary serial. Yet the serial, in one sense, is the most psychological kind of work in fiction. The characters may not be well portrayed, but the circumstances under which the reader meets them aids the effect.

The difference between the well-drawn character in the fine novel and the less successful portraiture of the serial, is rather like the difference between a week's visit from a fascinating friend and many occasional two-minute chats with an acquaintance. A fortnight's visit may become irksome because we must take it *en bloc*, while even a bore can be a genial chance acquaintance for a few minutes in each week.

The point is this : the serial writer keeps interest alive

by attracting attention to the people in his story. The mere stringing of incidents is not sufficient. The author of this kind of work has the greatest problem of all writers, up to a point: that of making his characters appealing. Beyond that point he has the easiest task of all; for the reader, by looking forward and waiting for the next instalment, contributes out of his own sympathy and imagination towards the successful effect.

So the author has one important task in each instalment. He must present at least one character whom the reader wishes to meet again, and who arouses the kind of sympathy that makes the reader rather eager for the meeting.

If he can close down an instalment upon such a scene, or such a dilemma as creates a wonder about the effect upon the one or more characters thus presented, he helps the reader to maintain this interest. By adding curiosity to attention he makes the reader a closer ally.

This point is emphasized because, though the average serial is often swift in movement and full in incident, the writer dare not omit or unduly diminish human nature interests. Plot by all means—a good plot—but let the persons make the chief appeal.

Topical Serials.

A strong point with many serials is that they are as fresh as the day's news. It is not always convenient or suitable to deal with the stirring events of the time, but the successful writer aims at getting the spirit and feeling of the moment.

During the second and subsequent years of the War this necessity was a great difficulty with editors. Readers would not read war stories, and the edict went out to writers to that effect. In consequence, many produced suggestions and writings that were impossible because

they dealt with old conditions. The War, as a subject, had to be omitted, but the war atmosphere was essential, for it was all around us and unescapeable ; A.D. 1913 was as far away as A.D. 1066.

Many editors, however, like more than atmosphere : they like topical events. In the cases of some newspapers it is notable that the trial at Newgate, in the news columns, is quite likely to be matched by a trial at Newgate in the serial. The stolen jewels case of one column is echoed in the other.

How a Serial is Written.

Serial stories are often written a few days or even hours before they appear. The procedure is as follows :

The first instalment and the synopsis or outline of plot and incident are duly passed, and the author is told to proceed. In all probability he is bidden to write about three instalments and perhaps a wind-up chapter. To these instalments may be added a few loosely written chapters to be used somewhere, and nearly all describing startling incidents.

Something like this would be necessary, should the story be advertised pictorially and a few incidents be required for the purpose. When the serial actually appears in print the case becomes one of committee work. The committee may consist of two persons only : the editor and the author, who meets once a week for a discussion of work done, of changes to be made, and of ideas for later developments.

Sometimes the committee may be larger, including a few sub-editors and advisers. Current events may be discussed, and alterations made which necessitate swift re-writing of what is in hand or the insertion of new matter.

The length of a serial usually depends upon its success and drawing power. There have been stories originally

planned to run through a few months, which have been lengthened out over a year and a half ; others, started in high hope of an equally long run, have been guillotined soon after their birth.

“ Keep it going ” is a pleasant command to an author, but no matter how successful the story may be, it is rarely a *carte blanche* order. At any moment the word may come, “ kill it,” and then great is the scramble.

The author who has all his lines of interest speeding along in noble progress—with mysteries, troubles, and problems all around him ; with some folk in dilemmas, and others in prison ; with oceans to cross to bring them together—may feel his hair whiten when suddenly informed he has a thousand words in which to finish the lot and sort out the tangles. But when the close comes, it must be sharp and swift.

Collaboration.

The serial story often offers good opportunities for two people of rather different outlook to write together in collaboration. A man who is strong in plot and human nature interest, and a woman who has a keen grip of feminine subjects and aspects, make a good combination. Some of the most popular serial stories of modern times were the work of such well-matched writers as Coralie Stanton and Heath Hosken, and Alice and Claude Askew.

The point is noted here, as it sometimes happens that an editor may be struck with the ability of a beginner in certain directions, and may know of another writer who would make a good ally. In one case where a suggestion of this kind was made, the offer was declined ; for the beginner, instead of regarding the proposal as it was meant, took it to be an attempt to take away some of the credit in a case where, as the junior writer, he would have to do most of the work.

Linked Series.

While upon the subject of serials, reference should be made to a class of stories that offers a better opportunity than the serial, to attain success in writing. This is the linked series.

The stories referred to are such sets of narratives as *Sherlock Holmes* by Conan Doyle, *Captain Kettle* by Cutcliffe Hyne, and *Raffles* by E. W. Hornung.

The idea of this class of fiction is that a month is too long a period over which to hold the reader's attention in the ordinary "To be continued in our next" manner, but not so long a time as to allow a strong character to be forgotten.

Hence, the same hero appears month after month, but each tale is complete in itself. A thread of similar interest runs through the series. Holmes is always an inductive detective; Raffles, always a gentleman burglar.

The creators of stories of this kind have consistently done better for themselves than the serial writers. A strong serial in the *Daily Mail* may be forgotten in three months. A strong-linked series in *The Strand* will build a reputation. The first means new ground to be broken if a novel is to be published; the other means easy entry to almost any book publisher's attention.

Of course, it is an exceedingly difficult thing to get a linked series accepted as such. The beginner who suggests such a thing may find very great barriers in his way. But those barriers are not insuperable.

The best method of procedure is to get one good story accepted first, and to write that story around a character and an idea that can reappear.

In this way W. W. Jacobs, in his *Wharfside* and *Village* tales, has made us familiar with the night-watchman, Bob Pretty, and other characters. He did not persist along the "personality" line as he might

have done, but the constant reappearance of old favourites with his public, has done much to help his popularity.

When another character of the calibre of Holmes, Raffles, Bindle, or the Night-watchman appears, editors may demur at recognizing him in six succeeding numbers. But that will not crowd him out. If the readers like Podsnap, the Photographer, in the June number, the editor may give another dose of him in September, and by January, decide he must be a monthly feature.

Just at the time of writing there is a greater opportunity than there has been for years, for this class of story. The number of monthly and fortnightly magazines is increasing, and these constitute the opening.

As a rule failure in this kind of work has not been on account of plot, so much as on account of characterization. The character or characters must really be outstanding and more or less convincingly human.

CHAPTER XIV

BOYS' AND GIRLS' STORIES

Boys are great readers of fiction and exceedingly severe critics. Counted in numbers of printed words and the circulation of the papers, it is almost certain that the boy as a story reader comes very near the head of the list. An examination of the closely printed boys' papers, and a knowledge of their sale, would amaze many people.

There is a tradition that any old style of writing will do for a boy. It is a quaintly absurd notion, for there are very few people who succeed in acquiring the particular style that gains his approval.

There is also a tradition that sensationalism and incident are alone required for this work. But a boys' paper that relies solely upon these things will lose its circulation in a month.

There must be a psychological appeal. There must be sentiment. There must be a knowledge of human nature—that is, of boys' nature.

SWIFTNESS. The boy is quick ; his emotions are easily stirred. He can pass from one phase of feeling to another more quickly than a grown-up person. Long introductions and parentheses are unnecessary.

INCIDENT. Things must happen. The boy wants to read of occurrences and likes them vigorously described.

APPARENT PROBABILITY. Events must be backed by the reasonableness of a fertile imagination. Boys' papers dealt with flying as a fact, long before other papers would permit an aeroplane in a story. The boy's idea of probability is strained and curious, but somewhere in the realms of science, history, or romance, there must be

a basis of fact in which the story can have its roots. A boy will read the most wildly imaginative stories ; but a departure from accuracy or probability, as he understands the terms, brings the scornful comment, " It is so silly," and he reads no more. Jules Verne, a generation ago, understood the boy's mind ; and Jules Verne never hesitated about putting long calculations into his books or stating scientific formulæ. His successor who writes to-day must make some kind of show of " proof," or he will fail.

DOMESTIC INTEREST. Some of the most popular boys' writers are remarkably successful in their appeal to the sentiments. The ideas of " home " and " mother " are very popular. The " girl chum " is another way of reaching a boy's heart. Love interest, of course, is meaningless here, but friendship, loyalty, family regard, and other simple virtues can scarcely be omitted with safety.

Girls' Stories.

The schoolgirl shares many interests with her brothers. Curiously enough she often prefers his papers and stories to her own. She likes adventure, movement, and incident as much as he does. But she does not ask for reasons as persistently. Scientific explanations bore her. She is not as interested in trips to the moon, treasure mountains in the Sahara, or inventions of stupendous consequence.

The girl is content to feel deeply over trivial things, provided they are the real things that belong to her own life. That the heroine should be falsely accused of copying another girl's exercise, is to her as thrilling an episode as the hero's discovery of a golden mountain might be to a boy.

But a girl's interest is not limited to simple things.

The schoolgirl stolen by an Asiatic tribe because "they want a white queen to rule them," is quite a pleasing adventure.

The Serial Form.

Boys and girls both approve of the serial form. They do this almost to the exclusion of any other. A boy's paper may be made up entirely of three, four, or five serial stories, some of which may run a whole year.

Boys also like the linked series. The Amalgamated Press own a detective character about whom complete stories, as long as many a novel, appear every week. They own, also, other characters who are as fresh as they were at the beginning of the century.

It is said that one must have a boy's mind to write a boy's story. This hardly expresses the real truth, but one must understand the boy's mind in order to succeed in this class of work.

Some very capable novelists and playwrights first learnt the use of the pen in this kind of fiction.

The advantage of success in writing for boys and girls is that the demand is very heavy on those who succeed, and the endeavour to cope with this demand gives facility in the use of the pen.

There is, however, a danger. To some people such writing gets to be a "knack" that limits them and prevents them from doing any other kind of work. The writer who finds a market here, should take care to exercise his pen and his mind with other subjects as well.

CHAPTER XV

THE NOVEL

TELL a publisher that you have a good idea for a book, and his face will glow with interest and expectation ; tell him it is to be a novel, and the haggard look will return.

There are two chief ways by which a publisher judges a novel. The first of these is the popularity of the author ; the second is the future possibility of the popularity of the author. There are other points, such as merit, subject, treatment, and interest, which may attract his sympathetic attention as a man, but which he does not easily allow to disturb his calculations as a trader.

This point is important to recognize, for a publisher, in dealing with novels, is practically forced to view them by counting-house standards.

There is a certain band of writers about whom he need not even consult his literary advisers ; he can deal with their books from a purely statistical point of view. He knows almost to a fraction how much he can afford to offer for Arnold Bennett's next book, or Ethel Dell's forthcoming volume ; and though, as a matter of form, the manuscript may be read before an offer is made, the deal is one in which his powers of estimating present values of demand, and his special capacities for working it to its utmost, are more important than his reader's opinion on the literary and popular appeal.

During recent years, commercial aspects have monopolized the attention of some publishing houses in a way that has entirely changed the method of regarding

authors. These are the publishers who have no interest whatever in the unknown writer. The known author to them is a man able to offer them the certainty of sales. The points for consideration are: "Can we estimate the extent of public interest in his next volume?" and, "Is our commercial machinery equipped in such a way, that we can offer him better terms than our opponents and yet clear our heels?"

Beyond these forms there is a second group who, either in addition to this method, or as a chief plan of action, continue the old plan of studying each book on its merits. In these cases it must be admitted that the likelihood of sales weighs more in the decision than do the merits of style and finish.

These firms are the best houses for the new author to approach. It is invidious to mention names, but the author can himself find them by keeping a watch on publishing columns to see who publish novels "By a new writer," and also, by ascertaining who published the first novels of those who have produced several.

A further group of publishers must be regarded with extreme care. These are the firms who express willingness to publish a book on some system by which the author contributes to the cost of the act. The beginner is advised not to proceed in these cases, unless he is able to supplement the efforts of the publishers, and also, to be certain that he will be fairly treated.

In most cases it is rather futile to do business in this way at all. Where an author decides to publish his own book he is usually wise to have the book printed at his own cost, and to make an arrangement for its publication, separately. There are firms, such as Simpkin, Marshall, who make a speciality of this kind of work.

Such firms would require to see and approve such a book before allowing their imprint to be placed upon it.

The arrangement of publication is usually a commission on sales.

A First Novel.

Placing a first novel is one of the greatest difficulties in authorship. It is said, however, that there is one difficulty still greater, and that is placing the second. Enterprising publishers will sometimes take a risk about a first book. If it takes on, well and good ; but if it does not, the writer is no longer an unproven possibility—he is a dud.

Of course, great results are not expected from a first book. Let there be a reasonable intimation of probable later success, and a publisher will persevere. Even if he has not quite recovered his outlay, he will give the author the benefit of his hopes. It is the dead failure in the first book that disheartens the publishing world.

When this occurs, the remedy is to try somewhere else.

Causes for Failing to Place a Book.

The chief reason why so many written novels are never translated into printer's ink, is that the writers undertake this kind of work as a first literary effort.

It is not here sweepingly laid down that this is always a foolish act. The author of these lines is personally intimate with a novel writer who had never tried to earn a penny by his pen when the impulse to write a novel seized him. Within four weeks of the birth of the idea the first book was written and sold, and within a further six weeks he was equally successful in placing another novel with a different firm.

But these cases are the exception and not the rule.

Usually an inquiry into the history of new authors who achieve sudden success in fiction, reveals the fact that ten or twenty years' strenuous work with the pen have preceded the first published novel.

As already indicated, the chief schools for the novelist lie in the magazines and periodicals which publish fiction. Some of the best known writers have found excellent practice in serial stories for boys and girls.

It is rather doubtful if short-story writing is quite as helpful to the novelist, because the kind of writer who succeeds with the short story is often the writer who breaks down at any long-sustained effort. On the other hand, the linked serial writer sometimes makes a good novelist, because he studies to sustain personality in a character, which is even more difficult than sustaining interest in a plot.

One opportunity of the new novelist lies in the new subject. When a topic of popular interest comes prominently and freshly before the public, the author who can immediately present a story dealing with the theme stands a good chance of having his work accepted.

Obviously, however, the author who does this sort of thing must act with energy and promptitude. He should pick a likely string of publishers with care and get in touch with at least one of them before the work is completed, so as to be sure that he will have swift attention, and that his manuscript will secure prompt reading.

But this opportunity, good as it may be, is not one that many people would care to build on. To rush out an eighty-thousand-word Egyptian novel because of a newly discovered secret in the Sphinx, involves much labour with little absolute guarantee of success.

A better opportunity appears to lie in the discovery of a new field in fiction. To indicate what is meant, a few examples are given—

Rider Haggard, in *King Solomon's Mines*, struck an entirely new vein.

Anthony Hope discovered two new variations, *The Dolly Dialogues* and *The Prisoner of Zenda*, each in its

different way a departure from anything done before. The latter of these two books has set a fashion that is still being followed. We are so accustomed to the idea of such work nowadays, that we hardly realize how entirely novel was the suggestion of old-time romance in a modern setting.

The Leavenworth Case, of Mrs. A. K. Green, bewildered many of its first readers. Many thought it was the account of an actual crime, and that the quotations from the newspapers were copies of real reports. Since then this realistic method has become one of the most common ways of telling a detective story.

Edgar Rice Burroughs has, within the past few years, got new variations into two old methods. His "Tarzan" stories and his Martian tales, while not being entirely new in idea, have novel features. The Martian tales particularly, by their setting of transferred personality from one planet to another, are more satisfactory than long-range guns and aerial flights could make them.

There is no secret recipe for novel writing. The best plan is : if you have in your mind an idea for a novel, go ahead and write it, even if you have never written a line for print before. The chances of the unknown writer's work being taken are few ; but there *are* chances.

When you have tried many publishers, and (if your courage has held out) written one or two more novels without success, and still persist in your dream, then it is almost certainly wise to gain practice in other fields of writing.

The fact is, the pen is a most difficult implement to wield, and usually involves an apprenticeship of some years before facility in this branch of work can be gained. So do some of the humdrum, drudgery work, and then spin another coin with fate, by writing another novel.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BOOK THE PUBLISHER WANTS

THE publisher wants you to bring him a book like Haydn's *Dictionary of Dates*, Roget's *Thesaurus*, Butler's *Phrase and Fable*. He will be quite genial if you bring him even the suggestion of a book with similar possibilities to these, and will very likely fit you up with a staff and tell you to "get on with it." Books of this kind sell all the year round and represent a steady income—often a very nice income! Sons buy new copies when their father's old ones fall in pieces. Every library must have one.

The publisher wants the kind of book that will command a good sale every year. Such publications as *Whitaker's Almanack*, and *The Statesman's Year Book*, would have regular sales.

Such books do not frequently suggest themselves to the mind. Nearly always, too, they are evolutions, growing out of smaller works that in the first place may have been quite feeble productions.

The most noteworthy modern case of an annual work of reference achieving rapid success is probably *Who's Who*, a book that is to be found in a surprisingly large number of libraries and offices. *Who's Who* was a distinctly good idea; it filled a want that was immediately realized the moment it was filled—and scarcely before.

There are numbers of "wants" like that in human life and affairs. There may be other books, perhaps, as useful as *Who's Who*, which publishers want and the multitudes want, but we cannot think of them. When someone does think of one, all the world will cry

"How absurd. How obvious. Why didn't *I* think of that?"

The public wants handbooks, works of reference, and textbooks—and the publisher wants them, because the publisher lives by selling what the public wants.

The first consideration, when an idea of a new book of this nature suggests itself to a writer's mind, should be "Is there a sufficiently large public to make it worth while to bring out a work of this kind?"

Thus, Haydn's *Dictionary of Dates* appeals to an appreciable percentage of the entire population. *Whitaker's Almanack* is necessary to an even larger number. Butler's *Phrase and Fable* interests a much smaller and more select group. Yet all three of these works are such that they are certain to command a regular and steady sale.

A publisher, in considering books of this class, divides humanity into groups. He will bring out a book at any reasonable cost, provided there is a group large enough to be interested, and sufficiently capable of buying.

He would consider a book devoted to "wireless" because he knows the class appealed to is large, interested, and able to buy such books (the subject of "wireless" is a bit overdone, but it serves as an illustration). He would be reluctant to consider a half-guinea volume on *The Science of Navy Work and Coal Heaving* because, though navvies and coal heavers may be two large classes, they do not require technical instruction in book form, and would constitute a difficult market in which to secure heavy sales.

The publisher sees humanity in classes, and is constantly met with the difficulty that the larger classes are usually well provided for. The fact does not dishearten him. He may see a part of a subject as a method of detaching a smaller group from a larger one.

Thus, supposing a publisher finds that all the text-books on farming and agriculture are general and deal with the whole subject, he may decide that "Eggs and Poultry" are a section by themselves. "I will get out a book or two for this class of reader. It shall keep to the one subject and ignore sheep farming, crop raising, and similar points." (This again is illustrative. Such work is already done.)

The fact that a subject has already been dealt with rather fully does not prevent a new treatment. Let us take a very large section of works: Children's school-books.

During the last decade or so, new methods of teaching have been advocated; educational works that recognize these methods are displacing the older works.

There is really no end to this process. The man who says "I purpose writing a new English Grammar," enters a fiercely contested field, but, if his work is of such a nature as to meet the approval of thousands of teachers, a publisher will welcome him.

The Book Obtained by Research.

The book, whether historical, political, literary, or of general interest, that involves research is often the book the publisher wants. Such a book as *Lamps, Pitchers, and Trumpets*, once well known among Ministers and Local Preachers, would command a sale. *A History of Parliamentary Elections* is the sort of thing to appeal to politicians. *Boyhood of Famous Men*, *Great Events of History*, and works of this kind have a class of readers.

But in this kind of writing, it is necessary that the author shall be capable of dealing with the subject and the publisher shall be convinced that he can find a market for the books.

This kind of work is rarely done on the off-chance of

publication. The author, having conceived the idea, sets to work to find a publisher who will commission him, or even assist him to carry out the necessary acts. When the "idea" has been accepted the rest of the work is a matter of arrangement.

The Man with a Story.

Another kind of book is the history of an experience, whether covering a lifetime or a shorter period. *Leaves of a Life*, by Montagu Williams, tells the life-story of a great criminal lawyer. *The Defence of London*, by Col. Rawlinson, is limited to the four years of air raids in London. *In Darkest Africa* narrates the occurrences of an exploration.

In these cases the one main interest lies in the personal note; the man tells his own story. It is essential that he shall have a story to tell, and provided there is sufficient interest in the story the teller can himself be entirely obscure.

It is probable there are a great many more opportunities here than are realized. Life is full of subject matter for thrilling and attractive narration. Fleet Street, the Arctic Regions, and Central Africa have been well done, but romances lurk in other places. *On the Stage—and Off*, Jerome's first book, told some parts of the truth about stage life that had never been popularly realized before. He staged the drab and sordid parts. We knew all about the glare and footlights.

CHAPTER XVII

ADVERTISEMENT WRITING

THERE are two kinds of occupation open to writers in the advertising world: staff appointments and free-lance contributions.

Experience in authorship or journalism is very useful as an entry to either kind of work. Advertisement writers are frequently men and women who have had some kind of experience in journalism and authorship.

Staff or Free-Lance ?

The aspirant who desires to become an advertisement writer should endeavour to gain a staff appointment, that is, to obtain employment as a "copy-writer" in the office of an advertising agent or of a firm of large advertisers.

Such positions are frequently offered in *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Daily News*, *The Advertiser's Weekly*, and other journals. The advertiser usually expects that the applicant shall have had some previous experience, and the important matter to discuss here relates to the nature of that experience.

In many cases it is sufficient for the applicant to have "made good" in writing for the ordinary press. The young man or woman who can show a thick pile of published articles and stories, has a strong case in applying for such a post. Advertising people are fairly broad-minded in this way, and, though they may hold that a journalist has much to learn to fit him for advertisement work, they regard ability to write as a first essential.

Advertising firms rarely look for their writers among

the general public, as editors and publishers may do. They are more inclined to look for them among those who have already graduated in Fleet Street. But there is no absolute rule in this matter.

Free-lance advertisement work is not usually a good way of entry to staff employment in advertisement land, as it sometimes may be in the world of newspapers and periodicals.

The reason is that free-lance advertisement writing is scarcely an occupation at all for a beginner. It is work requiring experience, and can scarcely be profitable to anyone who has not a fairly sound knowledge of advertising conditions. This will be discussed a little farther on.

Aids to Obtaining Staff Appointment.

"Copy-writers" who can do nothing but write the letterpress are handicapped in looking for a staff appointment. It is valuable at all events to be able to show that one understands the other parts of advertisement preparation.

Hence, an applicant should study "lay-out," that is, the arrangement of an advertisement as it actually appears in the press. It is not necessary for the writer to be an artist, but it is very useful for him to have artistic ideas, and to be able to make a neat sketch showing the way in which an advertisement should be shaped.

In applying for a position, the fact that he has a pile of cuttings to show is a good argument, but it is scarcely convincing alone. He should supplement it by making a few attempts at laying-out suggested advertisements.

The reason is that only the chief advertising agents can arrange to keep a writer employed solely on literary construction, and even these expect a writer to have some idea of arrangement.

“Lay-out” is considered very important by advertising firms. They may not expect that a beginner, coming to them from the ranks of journalism, shall be a master of this difficult art; but they do look for the copy-writer who shows he has an appreciation of its requirements.

Personal Application.

Reference has been made to answering advertisements. Nearly always these must be addressed to a box number, and the beginner may be one of hundreds of applicants.

Obviously, in any walk in life, the young man who means to “get there” does not wait for this kind of thing. If it is his intention to become a member of a staff, there is nothing like a bold frontal attack on the firms who have such positions to offer.

Free-Lance Work.

The free-lance worker for advertisers has a very difficult task and, unless armed with experience or very sound common sense, is quite likely to work very hard for practically no results whatever.

It is necessary here to explain the position of the advertising world about literary matter.

Business firms who advertise are of two kinds: (1) those who have their own departments for preparing the copy, pictures, and lay-out; and (2) those who pass over the whole task to professional advertising agents. Both kinds usually employ the services of the agents, but the former employ them only for commercial and technical acts.

The inexperienced free-lance is always in this difficulty: “Shall I put myself in touch with the firm direct, or shall I approach its advertising agent?”

Some time ago an advertisement free-lance writer worked out a good idea for an advertisement and sent

it to a firm of cycle manufacturers for whom it was suitable. The firm wrote back quite cordially, that they liked the idea and would be glad if he would call on Blank and Whitely, "our advertising agents to whom we have sent your letter."

He called.

"What do you mean by going behind us to our clients?" demanded Mr. Blank. "You know very well we are their agents; we told you so when you called here with an idea for one of our other clients."

"Precisely," was the reply, "and you also told me then that you had your own staff and never employed outside help. Where do I come in?"

Needless to say, these people were not typical of the newest order of things. Advertising agents nowadays naturally want the whole business in their hands, but they are reasonable folk and expect that every man will try to do the best he can for himself.

The free-lance writer who cannot obtain business from the agents is obviously free to go to the actual advertisers themselves. It is largely a matter of policy, and there are practically no rules to bind him save those of sense and fairness. Where a writer is being employed by an agent on work for one of his clients, it is clearly improper to try to get into direct touch with the firm.

Difficulties of the Free-Lance.

The real difficulty of the free-lance writer in advertisement land, is not in getting too little work, but in getting too much. But, unfortunately, this work is of the "submitted" kind.

Advertising agents are an enterprising, vigorous race, whose chief labour probably consists in obtaining new clients. On this task they spend time and money generously. Many of them regard the work of "putting

up schemes to likely firms " as one of the most important parts of the day's duty.

Some agents keep an indoor staff employed during its unneeded hours, upon this work. Others, whose indoor staff is limited to the needs of the actual business being done, regard the free-lance as the right person to undertake this labour.

The consequence is that a man of ideas and much energy can find himself armed with all kinds of opportunities of doing work, but possibly with quite the remotest chance of that work being used and paid for.

Very often this kind of thing is done in quite good faith. The agent will himself take any amount of trouble and he will be bewildered that the writer will not do the same. The fact is, that in making such an overture to a firm, an agent aims to secure a valuable account that may be worth hundreds or even thousands of pounds a year to him ; while success in carrying out the project may mean to the author only that he will receive payment for work he has done, possibly limited to a few guineas.

The author or journalist cannot afford to submit work and ideas in advertisement land, in quite the same way as he can afford to do it in the world of magazines and newspapers. He competes with big firms who are playing for big stakes. Printers on the look-out for thousand-pound orders, and agents looking out for heavy new accounts, can afford to give away work priced as high as his in order to secure better prizes. They throw away sprats to catch mackerel, which may be sound ; but throwing away sprats to catch sprats, is silly.

A Working Method.

A sound method with advertising agents, especially where the writer assists the agent, to secure an account

by doing the literary work for them, is to have some arrangement for two payments, thus—

“ My fee for this work would normally be £5, but as it may lead to nothing I shall charge you £2, on the understanding that I receive a further £8, if the overture is successful.”

Some arrangement of this sort means joining in the profit as well as in the risk. But the writer is hardly safe in doing this unless he insists upon some minimum payment in any case.

Naturally, there are exceptions to any rule. When a free-lance writer is constantly receiving commissions from a firm of advertising agents, he would hardly refuse to take some risk occasionally.

Style in Writing.

There is a tradition that the man who has failed as author or journalist always turns to advertising. This may have been the case at one time but it hardly holds good to-day.

The real truth is that the standards of the occupations materially differ in some very important points, and, in consequence, a writer who succeeds well in the work he does for editor and publisher may find himself hopelessly at sea in dealing with an advertiser ; while his less fortunate comrade, who cannot place an article or story, may be welcomed with open arms by the makers of advertisements.

Generalizations are of doubtful value, and least so in those occupations in which there are rapid changes. Just at the time of writing a number of advertisers are trying to break away from customary methods, and are doing it rather well ; so possibly, the two kinds of authorship are nearer together than ever they have been.

But, none the less, the beginner who wishes to write advertisements must face the fact that the person who buys his wares is primarily a business man and not an editor. The difference between the publishing house and the advertising office is a root difference. In the first the professional man is in control ; in the other the supreme authority is a man of commercial calibre.

Editors are daring and love innovation. Business men are cautious and prefer to repeat the successful act of the past than experiment with unproven weapons. Editors can test the pulling power of their contributions by circulation ; advertisers pay to have their matter inserted, so cannot estimate its worth in the same way.

On the other hand, the journalist or author is judged by whether he makes people want to read his matter ; the advertisement writer is judged only by whether he makes people want to buy the goods.

This root difference is referred to here, because the writer who turns from Fleet Street, to advertisement land, must not expect to find that precisely similar conditions obtain. Previous experience in any kind of writing is useful, but, no matter how successful the writer has been, he had better regard himself chiefly as a learner of a new art, till he has mastered the customs of his new occupation.

Special Studies for Beginners.

Hence, in this chapter are indicated the points to which the beginner should pay close attention.

Compression.

A beginner's " copy " is largely judged by the brevity and precision of its language. Right away at the back of all advertising is the sense that newspaper space costs money, so words must be few. In nearly all cases,

even where the space to be filled is ample, the advertising expert would sooner print 100 words in large type than 300 words in small. The journalistic and editorial idea that 300 words in small type which people wish to read, for the sheer pleasure of reading, are better than 100 words in large type that have no interest beyond bald statement, is perfectly sound ; but the world of advertising is only beginning to awaken to this fact, and the beginner may find himself in a place where it is wise not to start by being a reformer.

Brevity, however, is a good lesson to practise anywhere. Good writing is always brief, and the noblest literature of all, poetry, is the most compressed of all. But the beginner in advertisement writing is not likely to be judged by such standards. In consequence, he should study the special kind of brevity practised in this work.

Subject Matter.

The good advertisement writer is a pattern to all writers in one important respect. He is tireless in his search for facts and arguments. He may differ from the journalist in his treatment and estimate of the values of the material when it is found ; but in his method of research and inquiry, he works on very similar lines.

It is this fact, as much as ability to write, that makes some journalists take easily to advertisement work.

Perhaps the point about the difference of treatment can be made clearer by taking a sample case. A journalist and an advertisement copy-writer are both shown a pot of Blankintyre's Marmalade and told to write it up.

The journalist seizes three outstanding facts—(1) orange-growing ; (2) marmalade manufacture and distribution ; and (3) the " personal par." value of the Blankintyre family.

The copy-writer also sees all these openings and explores them to the utmost that time and strength will allow.

Thus far the two probably work on similar lines. But in the treatment of the matter they would be tempted to diverge.

The journalist would widen out into a fuller knowledge of Spain and oranges. He would find marmalade manufacture and distribution good enough for long articles in themselves ; and the Blankintyre family would be only at the beginning of its interest to him when he learnt that the oldest of the clan was a blind poet, and the niece of the chief partner was about to marry a baronet.

The copy-writer would not broaden out—he would narrow in. He would see a pot—a standardized one-pound pot—with its label of mauve background and yellow lettering ; and every fact he ascertained and every item of knowledge he dug out would be useless unless he could make them point a straight finger at that pot.

The point is this : the pot is the article. the public see in the shop. It is the thing to be sold. Fine writing is of no use unless the public demand and pay for the actual pot of marmalade itself.

The experienced copy-writer realizes this fact all the time. He may not use a tenth of what he has gathered by inquiry and research, because his writing must sell that actual article or it will misfire.

“ But, my dear man,” protests a critic, “ with a splendid subject like marmalade—with its far-reaching interests—why keep rubbing it in that the background of the label is mauve and the lettering is yellow ? Why shout at people that there are double-paper thicknesses between the confection and the air. Bless me. Can’t they see this when they buy the pot ? ”

They can, of course ; but if writing is the art of stimulating curiosity, the copy-writer would sooner make folk curious about the number of times the string were tied around the cover of the pot, than about the number of oranges that come from Spain.

Centralizing the Argument.

And this is where the beginner is apt to go astray, and where the practised copy-writer is sound. The sound advertiser sees the centre of the argument all the time. If it is marmalade, the centre of the argument is the actual sale of the pot itself over the counter ; if it is the advertisement of a new cyclopædia in six volumes on the instalment plan, the centre of the thing is getting people to send the first instalment. The centre may be visible or invisible, but it is always there, and all lines converge towards it.

The beginner who realizes this is likely to go astray by feeling that he must not go outside his subject at all.

That is not the point. He should study all the surroundings of his subject, but he should bring them back to the centre and work all the time around the query—" Will the reader of these words desire to buy a pot ? "

Writing to the Picture.

In authorship and journalism, the artist illustrates the letterpress ; in advertisement work, the operation is frequently reversed—the writer supplies the wording for the picture.

The journalist will constantly find himself up against this fact. Advertisers, as a rule, have great faith in the pulling power of a good illustration, and their first question about a lay-out is " How does it *look* ? "

There is very much wisdom in this attitude ; for certainly, a notice that does not interest at a first glance, misses much of its pulling power.

The beginner had better accept the fact in most cases—and regard the letterpress he writes as most useful when it backs up the picture or carries the interest it secures to the lesson to be taught.

But this should not make him *rely* upon pictures entirely. A large number of advertisements are not illustrated, and probably their proportion will always be maintained. Striking letterpress that stands upon its own is more popular among advertisers to-day than ever it has been.

Co-operative Effort.

The copy-writer should cultivate the habit of working with others. It is more necessary to do this in publicity preparation than in almost any other kind of writing.

The really successful commercial appeal is frequently a composite affair, in which many minds may have their part. There are, for instance, the three recognized parts of an ordinary newspaper advertisement : (1) there is the “lay-out,” or plan ; (2) there is the picture, or artist’s work ; and (3) there is the “copy.”

Behind all of these is the “idea,” the germ of the overture, perhaps in the first place a very small thing indeed. Any one of those three may be the originator who calls the other colleagues into conference.

There have been cases in which an advertisement has been the joint work of possibly half-a-dozen people. In some offices it is quite customary for each overture to be passed from hand to hand, and for every worker to endeavour to improve upon it. The writer

has known of a case in which it was desired that a brief sentence not exceeding sixty words, which set out a rather involved statement, should give point to a bold and convincing picture. In that case, at least, eight copy-writers, staff and free-lance, were invited to improve upon the draft before it was ultimately settled.

CHAPTER XVIII

FREE-LANCE LIFE

THE man who works for himself usually works for a tyrant or a bad paymaster. When the office hours are from ten till six a worker has at least one useful standard by which he can rule his life. But when it is just as easy to commence work at any hour of the day one likes, it is surprising how easy it becomes to "leave the confounded job till to-morrow morning."

Let us deal with the troubles that harass such a writer.

Moods.

As soon as anyone touches creative work, he begins to hear and think about that detrimental thing: the "artistic temperament." While it is frankly admitted that original writing of any kind exhausts some people physically and nervously in a surprising manner, it is also suggested that this kind of nervous exhaustion is not always easy to distinguish from the "tired" feeling of the shirker.

There are times in the life of an author or journalist when nature bids him to stop, and he dare only persist in his work at the cost of a nervous collapse of more or less serious nature. But there are more frequently occasions when he is halted by disinclination or by the developed habit of postponement.

Unfortunately, a writer has no means of gauging his work done against his capacity to do. The artistic temperament can easily deceive him into a life of lounging and idleness, or entice him into a fevered activity that burns up his nervous forces.

Some men and women who make good in this kind of work find it useful to make rules for themselves. Gilbert Frankau recently declared that he found it a great advantage that he had been brought up to business and had learnt to keep office hours.

Here is a statement of an author which may be useful—

“ I found myself becoming a creature of moods. Sometimes it was easy to write, and I wrote—other times I wasn't in the mood for it, and went about other things till an inspiration came. But presently I found that the ‘ inspirations ’ began to weaken, and the habit of ‘ just hanging around ’ began to grow on me.

“ Abruptly I made a rule : ‘ mood for it or no mood for it, at ten o'clock every morning I will seat myself at my roll-top desk, pen in hand and a writing pad before me, and sit there till one o'clock. All that time I will *try* to write.’

“ It was a very moderate rule. It covered only three hours in the day. For three months I adhered to it. There were mornings when I did not write a hundred words good enough for print, and there were mornings when I turned out three thousand words.

“ The effect of this discipline, however, was that in three months I had no need for it, because I had discovered in that time how to detect the difference between legitimate barriers of inability and the broad, easy tendency to laze. Before the three months were up I was in the swing of mental activity which enabled me to work at times, without tiring, from ten in the morning till sunrise the next morning ; and I knew the time had come when I might again let inclination rule me and not force myself to give out when the brain wanted to lie fallow.”

This was the experience of a man with a temperament, who at times could match his quantity of output against

almost any other writer for the press, but who at other times found it hard work to write a dozen lines for print.

His point was, "keep hours when you find yourself slipping." Not once, but three or four times, did this writer adopt the rigid daily plan till he had again got the grip of himself.

The free-lance writer will almost certainly find that it is easier to write a chapter at one time than a sentence at another. There are often days when one may toil very hard and achieve nothing, as there are also times when the hours for meals and a little sleep may be grudged, because of the longing to get one's thoughts on paper.

But, as far as possible, one should keep master of one's moods; for extremes meet, and the poet and the tramp are brothers under the skin.

Inclination Work and Bread and Butter Work.

Most of us who write, live the tortured experience of having to write for our public instead of writing for ourselves. Many of us may have done some rather fine things in the way of poetry which warm-hearted relatives hold to be "rather better than Milton and more expressive than Shakespeare." But the baker will not deliver bread against the off-chance of one's getting a laureateship, while editors (though delighted, as sentient creatures, with the rippling cadences of the verse) incline to take practical views about the kind of stuff they want you to do for the next number.

The man with the fountain pen is continually torn between the inclination and practical work. This affects not simply the choice of subjects but the choice of methods.

"I think you will get on," said a publisher to a new author, "because it is clear that you are not afraid to 'write down.' Most beginners like to impress the reader with their wisdom, but you try to be as simple as you can."

Most of us have heard the phrase "writing down." The man who can be eloquent in "Relativity," "The Fourth Dimension," and "The Undistributed Middle," but who, at the editor's bidding, writes on "How motor goggles are made," or on "Pile Driving and Dock Dredging," may feel he is writing down in choice of subject. Equally, the lecturer on "Electron Activity" before a learned society, who undertakes to do it into simple language for the readers of "Percival's Popular Press-bag," may be writing down in method.

Either kind of "writing down" is highly proper in its place. The man who uses a pen should get a sense of multitude and learn how to write for a public of some kind. He should realize the practical difficulties which beset publisher and editor, all of which are primarily connected with the obligation to give value for money. The writer may be an idealist, but even if he disclaim being a tradesman, he has to associate with those who trade his wares—who buy from him in order to sell to the public.

This fact has a special meaning to the man who seeks to earn his living by the pen. It is a defensible line to take, that the pen should never be prostituted to mere ends of living earning; but, granted that author or journalist has a right to a living from his profession, the obligation to give his public value for what they spend, is obvious.

But while this right of the reader is admitted, it is not advised here that popularity be purchased at the price of principles. Apart from ethical arguments, the plan is

bad policy. The popular writer is nearly always a sincere writer. The trimmer betrays himself and fails to grip. A clever Conservative may be able to write passable Liberal leading articles or vice versa, but those leaders will not convince a rabbit. They may bring the day's bread, but they will never make the writer's fame. A man of lesser gifts who gets through with some red-hot stuff that he really believes, will find his place to the top much quicker, and gather a loyal public around him more certainly.

The Uses of Variety.

Be versatile by all means, but remember you cannot build a castle with sand.

One of the difficulties of a facile writer whose style is easy and graceful, consists in the broad range of subjects which appeal to him for treatment. These subjects can easily scatter as widely as heaped sand that spreads out in all directions.

At the beginning of his career the journalist should do all the work that comes to him and hunt for more. Often the unexpected avenue leads to success. But as time goes on and the discovery is made that markets are easier found, and results are better in one class of work than in another, the time has probably come for concentration of effort.

In precisely the same way, it is a good thing to see as many editors and publishers as possible at the start, and it may always be wise to keep in touch with all new movements, and especially to pay attention to any vigorous novel departure which may give one a favourable entry to a new paper ; but, it is well to devote one's chief energies to a small group of editors or publishers.

Keeping Up One's Stock.

A grocer cannot keep selling without getting new stock to replenish the old. The writer is in the same position.

Journalists who are constantly moving around among active-minded men and women, manage to keep the stock of ideas replenished by the simple act of listening. The writer, on the other hand, who does no interviewing and whose work chains him to his desk, is not always so fortunate.

This is the kind of man who should study to mix with his fellows and keep up his reading. The two parts of his equipment which should be maintained, at all costs, are experience of human nature and knowledge of data for subject matter.

The writer does not usually find that it is helpful to select reading matter too similar to the work he is engaged in writing.

An author who divided his attention between lighter works of fiction and a rather more serious endeavour in literary and historical subjects, once made a curious statement: "While I am writing fiction I find that it does not help me to read novels, as the effect is to cause a general sense of unreality, which is bad for my work. On the other hand, while I am engaged upon more serious and difficult tasks, in which, necessarily, I have to refer to books of rather heavy character, I find that novels are the best form of reading for recreation."

All writers may not agree with this method, but it indicates a way that is well worth trying.

The writer of light, scrappy matter and short stories, intended for the very popular press, should be careful to do a reasonable amount of solid reading. Such writers may shy at profound studies in heavy folios, but this is not necessary. Some of our modern brilliant essayists have the virtue of compression, and some of our literary

papers and magazines can serve up small doses of fine writing in an attractive form.

The above is merely a suggestion, but the writer who wants to "stay it out," must feed his imagination; and reading matter which touches a little below the surface may help him in this way better than the merely superficial.

CHAPTER XIX

THE AUTHOR'S BUSINESS METHODS

THE author is not supposed to be very capable at business, and where this is true all the hints and advice that can be given upon the subject are scarcely likely to help him very much. Hence, all that is attempted in this chapter is to write about a few of those places in which he may save himself unnecessary effort and unnecessary loss.

The man who deals with editors and publishers has very simple money transactions. At the beginning of his career, at all events, he is usually able to keep all his accounts in his head if he wishes to do so. But the plan is not to be commended.

It is a good habit, as soon as a transaction has definitely been carried through to a money stage, for a record to be made. Such records should be kept in one book. Elaborate systems of double entry, such as might please a chartered accountant, only serve to bewilder a certain type of worker ; and it is not suggested here that the free-lance author or journalist should burden himself with what is distasteful or difficult. But when a money stage is reached in any piece of work a record of some sort should be made.

To make this clearer, we will explain the simple method that a busy free-lance writer found very useful during a long experience on Fleet Street.

He kept a small card index.

Every time he wrote an article, a story, leader, or any other kind of contribution, he made a card for it. Each card was headed at the top with the name of the contribution and a few facts such as length and description.

As carefully as possible he would keep notes on each card, of the journeys that the contribution took—with names of firms to whom it was submitted, dates of rejections, and its final history.

Here is a sample of a card. (The case is fictitious and used for illustration only.)—

THE SECRET OF THE BLUE DOOR.

Story, 2,500 words. Completed, 17th June, 19..

19..		19..
June 19th.	" Red Magazine."	Returned, June 30th.
July 4th.	" Novel Magazine."	" July 15th.
" 18th.	" Pearson's Weekly."	" July 22nd.
" 23rd.	Detective Magazine.	
Aug. 1st.	Cut to 1,500 words at editor's wish.	
" 3rd.	Detective Magazine. Accepted, Aug. 12th.	

As soon as this writer definitely made a sale, he withdrew the card from the index and filed it among others disposed of in the same way.

At the same time he made an entry in his day-book. Serious accountants may shake their heads, but this man, rarely having more than half-a-dozen transactions in the week, made no attempt to keep any other book than this, excepting a copy of his bank account.

Every time he sold a story or article he entered the fact, with the name of the firm or editor on the left-hand side of the book, extending the amount he was to receive, into the cash columns ; but often he could not fill in this amount until the cheque for payment actually arrived.

On the right-hand side of the book he entered the cheques received, not in the order in which he received them, but in the space opposite the earlier entry he had made.

This is a very " rule of thumb " system, but if it comes to a choice between this system and none at all we are in favour of the above.

The whole point is : " Keep a record."

One advantage of this man's system was that he always knew some important facts.

He knew how much matter he had that was not placed.

He knew where those contributions were, or, as they were returned, what editors had already seen them.

He knew what contributions had been accepted, but were not yet paid for.

He knew what articles were being held up longer than was necessary.

Practically, by turning a few cards and by glancing through a few pages, he knew the important facts of his business at any time.

There was another advantage in his system. Offers of purchase and statements of acceptance he usually dealt with as they occurred, transferring the card and entering the sale. But otherwise, he did all his book-keeping work at one stated time in the week, usually Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning, for Wednesday was his day among the editors.

All rejected manuscripts and all newly written work accumulated till Tuesday evening (his work was not highly topical and he believed in presenting it personally). Then, or the following morning, he would take these manuscripts, decide where to submit them, enter up the cards, and sally forth.

Every now and again he found it necessary to go through and prune his card index. This would be a partly automatic task; for when a manuscript has been returned a certain number of times a writer usually takes it for granted that the work is at fault and, in its present form, will never be placed.

The writer found that such futile endeavours gradually accumulated, till he had a collection of manuscripts which, for some reason or other, he would "withdraw from circulation."

These he would carefully overhaul. One or two might be sent off on another series of trips, perhaps ultimately to find a billet. The others would be placed among those "outlines," "ideas," "half-completed stories," and "notes" that most writers find useful to keep. The cards for these would be withdrawn from the index.

The simple method is explained, as it worked well in this case for some years, or until the writer in question struck a happy vein in serial writing and had no time for non-commissioned work.

Finished and Unfinished Manuscripts.

A lady who had had a little good fortune in writing, married a man with a severely commercial mind. Like a proper lover he esteemed her work highly, but when he saw her file of unplaced manuscripts his business instincts protested.

"Why arn't these things out?" he asked. "My travellers keep showing my wares or I shouldn't do any trade. You must keep them moving."

"But these have all been rejected," she explained.

"I'll put a junior clerk on it as a little extra job," he said. "Your future address for manuscripts will be at the office. The day that a manuscript is in the place three working hours, he shall have a reprimand."

Within a comparatively short period that writer was placing all she could write, and the alarming original pile was at zero.

Keep finished manuscripts out! When, like prodigals, they return home, spend the fattened calf money on postage stamps and send them off again.

The unfinished manuscript is a great deal more of a problem. Some people are remarkably happy at beginning new work, and even though they may carry

through a certain amount of it to a conclusion, there is nearly always an accumulation of efforts in different stages of incompleteness.

A novel writer was asked if he had always finished all the novels he began.

"Certainly not," he said. "I have frequently written five, ten, or even twenty thousand words of a book which I have afterwards abandoned. Usually, in the case where much has been written, the reason for dropping it is that a new and better way of telling the story, or of using the plot, has suggested itself.

"But I always keep these beginnings," he said. "They are a kind of mine to me. In my last novel, for instance, I was able to work in three situations which I had planned to use as the main plots of three separate stories. I had dropped the work in each case because the idea was too thin for sustained interest, but as 'thickening for the gravy' they were splendid."

In addition to these longer attempts (which may run into ten to fifty pages or more of manuscript), the writer will find himself perplexed with large numbers of single, double, and triple sheets of notes and commencements.

There is no golden rule for filing these efforts. One writer divides them into three groups—(1) single sheets ; (2) short attempts of two sheets and upwards ; and (3) parts of books and serials. Otherwise his only rules are : "Take care to clip allied pages together, and keep them in files or drawers for easy reference. Do not classify them too much. Every now and again look through them ; they will supply ideas."

Re-writing Stories.

The story or article that has been abandoned as hopeless, because it has been rejected by every suitable paper, is well worth consideration with the idea of re-writing it.

Some little while ago a short-story writer who had many disappointments at the beginning of his career, but who caught the knack at last, took up the big bundle of stories which he had failed to place in his earlier days. Somehow or other he had never been able to nerve himself to destroy them.

To his surprise he found that there was one description for them all: "The plot is good; the presentation is hopeless."

This bundle gave him work for months. Practically every one was re-written and placed.

This, perhaps, was an exceptional case. The plot of ten years ago would rarely be suitable to-day, but this writer was strong in plot.

Press-Day Etiquette.

"I can't write like a genius, but I am always punctual with copy," was one journalist's rather odd way of describing himself.

Contributors are forgiven much in Fleet Street, but the offence that jars the editor's soul and nerves as much as any, is failure to fulfil a promise when the copy is wanted. When an editor says "Eleven o'clock, Tuesday," he does not mean "Four o'clock, Wednesday."

Unpunctuality does not matter very much in some kinds of work, such as those which are not topical and are complete in a single manuscript. But in work like serial writing, the editor is very reluctant to commission an author who is known to be careless in the regularity with which he delivers his instalments.

Some serials are so neatly abreast of the times, that they are driven up to the last moment in order to have the current atmosphere. In such a case the man who holds the pen is likely to hurt himself if he breaks faith in appointments.

Regular feature articles, too, are influenced by the reputation for punctuality.

Business Arrangements with Publishers and Editors.

The honour of Fleet Street is high, and when work is commissioned it is often only by word of mouth. This is particularly the case where the amount of money involved is not large. When the editor of a reputable paper says "Write me an article of 2,000 words on the subject," or "make that story 15,000 words," most authors will do it and feel confident that the editor's commission will be backed by the firm's cheque, though there is not a line in writing to prove the order was given.

A legal-minded man would say this is very unbusinesslike; but it is usually more businesslike to take commissions in this simple manner than to astonish a good-hearted editor, who never went back from his word, with a request for something in writing.

Where longer work is involved, such as the preparation of a volume, an agreement or a written order is desirable, and there is rarely need for the author to ask for it.

A true incident may be narrated here.

Some time ago an author was commissioned to write a long complete story, which commission he duly executed. Between the time of receiving the order and delivering the manuscript the editor had a dispute with the directors of the firm and left. The managing director, a man of all-round capacity, himself acted as editor till he could find a successor. He returned the manuscript.

"But it was ordered," said the author in an interview.

"Very well. Show a signed order and we pay" was the reply.

"But there was no signed order."

"That will be a lesson to you to be more businesslike,"

said the managing director as he finally refused payment, "You will get signed orders in future."

"I can't afford to risk it," said the writer. "I have too large and valuable a connection, and I don't intend to offend all the editors who have treated me honourably, because of this trip between Jericho and Jerusalem."

Curiously enough the firm appointed a new editor who met the author.

"I want you to write a long complete for me," said the editor.

"I will," said the author. "Will you put the order in writing?"

"I have never had such a request before," declared the editor with annoyance.

The story is told and the reader must draw his own moral. In the course of some years a contributor is sure to meet with occasional circumstances in which he may blame himself for not getting the order in writing.

The best way is to take these circumstances in a sporting spirit and be a good loser. This is infinitely wiser than adopting the "legal" attitude of mind. Editors for the reputable houses are men whose word is good enough for most transactions. If the work involved is long, and the risk is too great for a poor man to take without some guarantees, an editor will far better understand a payment on account than a legal safeguard.

Literary Agents.

The beginner should be his own literary agent. There are some excellent agents in London, but these people are only of use to the man who has a public.

When there is an indication that publishers are willing to compete with one another for an author's work, the agent can make the best bargain for the author, and save him a great deal of trouble.

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